THE SARASVATĪ RIVER

by

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The Sarasvatī River

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the *Ṛg-veda* the Sarasvatī is a mighty river that runs from the mountains all the way to the sea (RV 7.95.2). It is also a major protagonist in the confrontations between *āryas* and non-*āryas*, always on the side of the *āryas*. It is praised in several hymns as a powerful deity and a secure refuge for her devotees. From a list of rivers given in RV 10.75.5-7 we can gather that the river Sarasvatī was to be found west of the Yamunā and east of the Sindhu.

Yet nowadays nowhere in the Panjab such a powerful and lengthy river is to be found. Are we to conclude that the Sarasvatī River is merely a mythological entity with no geographical reality?

In this work I review some of the pertinent passages in the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata*, after bringing in some modern archaeological and geological findings. I can thus define three ages in Sarasvatī's life span: her young, Ṛg-vedic age; her middle age, characterized by her disappearance place, spoken of in the *Mahābhārata*; and her current traces in a desert area. In the main body of this work, then, I rely on textual analysis to describe and contextualize some of the features of Sarasvatī's first and second ages. I wish to wrap up the discussion by tentatively reconciling the textual and the archaeological / geological views.

Two angles

In an attempt to better understand Sarasvatī's life history I briefly describe two world-views — *bráhman*-based and *prakṛti*-based, or *vaidika* and *a-vaidika* — and try to show how people and events are given a place within each one of those world-views or *dharmas* according to the type of "logic" that characterizes them. Specifically what I am dealing with here is the confrontation between *āryas* and non-*āryas* in the *Ṛg-veda* and in the *Mahābhārata*. While the Ṛg-vedic poets speak about "our *bráhman*" and about some people who have an affectionate relationship with *bráhman* (RV 1.152.6–7, 5.85.1, 8.1.3) they mention as well other people who are haters of *bráhman* (RV 2.23.4, 5.42.9, 6.53.2–3, 7.104.2, 10.125.6); later on, the *Mahābhārata* heroes, the Pāṇḍavas, will fight precisely against those haters of *bráhman* (MBh 9.16.45).

Furthermore, it is also possible to find two sets of explanations for one and the same course of events. In other words, I am suggesting that there may be strategic points which indicate that some correlations may exist between two apparently divergent sets of explanations. The Sarasvatī River appears to be one of those points in the sense that a single phenomenon — the river changes — may be explained from an archaeological / geological perspective (a *prakṛti*-based explanation) as well as from a textual perspective (a *bráhman*-based explanation). The Sarasvatī River, then, exists both on the level of *prakṛti* and on the level of *bráhman* and, consequently, her study may be approached from both angles thus leaving the door open for interdisciplinary research.

Differences

From the textual analysis one can gather that Sarasvatī has a different significance in the type of confrontations that the *āryas* of the *Ṛg Veda* were involved

in and those of their namesakes in the *Mahābhārata*. Concomitantly, her river form is manifested differently in those different times and circumstances. Sarasvatī is a key protagonist in the *Ṛg-veda*, but she has disappeared by the time of the *Mahābhārata* war. And the stated reason for her to do so is precisely certain people's language and ideology in *Mahābhārata* times.

Restating the above paragraph in terms of our *bráhman–prakṛti* dichotomy, I may say that both in the *Ṛg-veda* and in the *Mahābhārata* the underlying plot is the confrontation between those who practice a *bráhman*-based language and *dharma* (the *āryas*) and those who practice a *prakṛti*-based language and *dharma* (the non-*āryas*). In both cases Sarasvatī is clearly on the side of *bráhman* followers. Yet in the *Ṛg-veda* while she takes sides she does so by remaining as a full-fledged river, whereas in the *Mahābhārata* the nature of the confrontation leads her to disappear from the ground she used to run on.

While I am aware that this is not the central point of my work here, I am assuming that the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata* are linguistically and ideologically different, to some degree still to be precisely determined. It seems that the basic confrontations between the followers of different kinds of *dharma* are carried on in the *Ṛg Veda* on a cosmic level whereas in the *Mahābhārata* they assume a more terrestrial character, without excluding the cosmic level that is. Thus in the *Ṛg-veda* it is Indra, not the humans on earth, who fights against *dasyus* and *paṇis*. In the *Mahābhārata*, on the other hand, the five Pāṇḍava brothers and their allies engage in personal combat not only with some *āryas* with whom they have ideological disagreements while sharing the same language, but also with *mlecchas*, the speakers of a different language or dialect and the followers of a significantly different *dharma*.

Continuity

The study I have done thus far seems to indicate that beyond their differences there is some continuity as well between the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata*, both in terms of language and of conceptual / ideological system (*dharma*). The basic factor that remains constant is *bráhman* as the foundation of language and *dharma*. Consequently, Sarasvatī and her peculiar "triple personality" — she is not only a three-tiered river, but also a heavenly goddess and the most subtle, primordial sound and knowledge — is somehow present in both texts.

My hypothesis is that the Sarasvatī River is intimately connected with a particular kind of language and *dharma* — the *bráhman*-based ones found in both the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata*. In other words, although there appear to be linguistic and ideological differences between the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata*, there is also a thread of continuity uniting them and, concomitantly, Sarasvatī is to be found all along. She makes herself available for those who are her friends.

Sarasvatī's uniqueness

So far I haven't found any other case of a river that is also the personification of language / spiritual understanding, although the Gaṅgā is another one-of-a-kind case and although the Sutlej is said to have branched out in one hundred channels while interacting with Vasiṣṭha. All this leads me to the tentative conclusion that we are facing here a phenomenon that somehow represents a feature typical of a Sanskrit-related culture. As for us modern English speakers, a river with a "triple personality" is quite out of the normal.

Although it may be possible to find that other ancient textual traditions speak of relationships between plain rivers and people or even "higher-level" rivers and people,

at present I am in ignorance of them. I asked on Internet whether there is any textual evidence from non-Vedic-related traditions for changes in river courses motivated by the river's personal relationship with certain people, and the only reply I received was the following:

> The Che (Zhe) River, from which Chekiang Province in China takes its name, had a famous tidal bore which was traditionally said to have been caused by the death of Wu Tzu-hsu (Wu Zixu) a paragon of loyalty in the late 6th-early 5th century B.C. This is not a change of course, but it is a change of attitude... (David Johnson, UC Berkeley).

It appears, moreover, that no river is given a similar significance and active role in Avestan literature as the Sarasvatī in the *Ṛg-veda*, despite the existence of a river in Baluchistan that bore a similar name in the past. From the textual perspective this can be understood by looking at, for example, the linguistic and ideological differences between *Ṛg-veda* and Avestan, which are much more substantial than those between *Ṛg-veda* and *Mahābhārata*. Whenever the appropriate language and type of *dharma* are lacking, a triple-personality type of river will not be found in that particular environment.

Sarasvatī's location within the world of the *āryas* is indeed a central one, according to the literature and the traditional lore. Thus, one of Pāṇini's commentators and the dictionary *Amarakośa* both describe the river Sarasvatī as the boundary between Prācya and Udīcya (see Bharadwaj 1991 ch. 2; Bhargava 1964 pp. 73 & 84). She is in the middle, between the East and the North.

In this connection I may add that Pāṇini distinguishes two branches of Sanskrit scholars as well as two urban styles — northern and eastern. In several *sūtras* of his *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (4.3.19, 4.1.153, 4.1.157–159, 7.3.46) he cites the grammatical authority of the northerners (*udīcām*); in several others (4.1.17, 4.1.160, 5.3.80) that of the easterners (*prācām*). He speaks also of a town of the northerners (4.2.109: *udīcya-*

grāma) as well as of towns, cities, and places of the easterners (1.1.75, 4.2.120, 4.2.123, 4.2.139, 6.3.14, 6.3.24) and even of a game played by the easterners (6.2.74). In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* both the speech of the Uttara-kurus (in Kaśmīr) and that of the Kuru-Pañcālas (easterners) are praised as best (see Macdonell & Keith 1967).

Summary

My work here aims simply at establishing two hypotheses that could be used in some future work:

[1] A river with a triple personality is a phenomenon intimately connected with, or that only makes sense in the context of, the Sanskrit language itself or any Sanskrit-derived language and the corresponding type of *dharma* (ideology).

[2] Changes in a river of this kind, within the context of textual analysis, are concomitant with major changes in language and *dharma*. In terms of archaeological / geological analysis, powerful geophysical, meteorological, etc. factors are expected to account for such changes.

In other words, the changes in the Sarasvatī River may be studied both from a textual and from an archaeological / geological perspective, thus arriving at two sets of explanations. I suggest here that the results of both analyses may be reconciled by closer interdisciplinary work. Again, my work so far has led me to set up the above hypotheses. To confirm them by looking for all possible ways to refute them is a much larger task.

My textual sources indicate that there have been at least two stages in Sarasvatī's life span before present. I have added a brief reference to some recent archaeological and geological findings mostly for their suggestive value, knowing well that the materials I have had access to are not sufficient to establish similarly clear-cut

stages.

The textual analysis done thus far suggests — but does not definitely prove — that the change from Sarasvatī's younger age to her middle age is marked by a difference in the confrontations between *āryas* and non-*āryas*, which is described here as being of a linguistic and ideological character. As a corollary of the above, from a possible comparison with Avestan (perhaps the closest non-Indo-Aryan language) it is also suggested that Sarasvatī's sui-generis character may be typical of a Sanskrit-related culture.

This work is merely a surface-scratching one. The need is clear for further textual and archaeological /geological research on this topic so that the results of both approaches may be reconciled on firmer grounds. And beyond this topic, the Sarasvatī River, the work could be expanded into a thorough comparison of the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata* that would cover all their textual and archaeological implications.

CHAPTER 2: ARCHAEOLOGICAL / GEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

It was almost impossible to imagine a mighty river running through the arid plains and dunes of the Thar desert. Yet both here in Muslim Cholistan, and across the border in India's Rajasthan, tribal bards tell tales of just such a river which flowed here before the desert existed. The stories are matched in the Rig-Veda... Additional confirmation came from Sir Auriel Stein [1940], British archaeologist, explorer, and ancient civilization-hunter extraordinary. He studied the Veda and noticed that one river was given greater prominence than either the Indus or the Ganges. That river was the Saraswati, referred to in the texts as 'the holiest of rivers, flowing down from the mountains and into the sea' ...
Stein knew a good story when he heard one. And like any geographer worth his salt, he recognized that legends often contain the key to events of the remote past. The Veda gave little geographical information about the actual location of the Saraswati, but numerous local legends brought the octogenarian Stein to the Thar desert... He had observed that an ancient river bed could sometimes be located by a continuous ridge of sand-dunes, a ridge created when drifting sand piled up over a core of vegetation such as might be found on a river bank. It wasn't long before Stein had discovered such a ridge at Hanumangarth in Bikaner state and he tracked it south-west fro 250 miles into Cholistan. On the way, he came across numerous mounds smothered in shards of terracotta. These, Stein guessed, were all that remained of the towns and villages which had once stood on the river, abandoned millennia ago to the drifting desert sands (Asher 1990 p. 28).

Recently a scholar reminded us that "the Sarasvatī is still a mighty stream in the *Ṛg Veda*, whereas it dries up progressively after the mid-2nd millennium BC" (Witzel 1995 p. 13). It has recently been stated as well that during the second millennium BCE many of the Indus Valley settlements were abandoned (Shaffer & Lichtenstein 1995 p.

13). And in this regard the following observations have been made:

> It is evident that a major geographic population shift accompanied this 2nd millennium BC localization process. This shift by Harappan and, perhaps, other Indus Valley cultural mosaic groups is the only archaeologically documented west-to-east movement of human populations in South Asia before the first half of the first millennium.
>
> The reasons for this population movement remain unknown. Certainly the changing Ghaggar-Hakra River drainage pattern played a significant role for regions directly affected by it. Limited palaeonvironmental studies in Rajasthan and elsewhere suggest an overall increase in aridity as another factor... Certainly this complex situation has multiple explanations. However, an understanding of what happened is unlikely to be achieved without a major paradigm change in South Asian archaeology (op. cit. p. 14).

There are a number of mostly dry river beds between the Yamunā and the Sutlej [Śatadru] in Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan. It has been suggested that some of them correspond to the successive beds of the Yamunā, which moved eastward from being connected with the Sarasvatī to being connected with the Gaṅgā (Dikshit 1977 p. 62; Agarwal 1984 p. 190). The Ghaggar-Hakra itself is formed by a combination of two rivers that meet on the Indo-Pakistan border. The eastern arm of the Hakra is the product of four rivers: the Chautang or Dṛṣadvatī, the Sarasvatī, the Ghaggar, and the Wah or Sonamwal. The Hakra's western arm is formed by three rivers known as Naiwal. Oldham was of the opinion that the Sutlej flowed into the Hakra through each of these presently dry beds, gradually shifting its course from east to west (Dikshit 1977 p. 62; Misra 1989 pp. 149–155). That the Sutlej once flowed into the Ghaggar [Sarasvatī] has also been shown by Landsat imagery (Agarwal 1984 pp. 189–190). In due course, then, and presumably as a result of at least tectonic movements, the

Sarasvatī River lost the Sutlej on the west and the Dṛṣadvatī and perhaps the Yamunā on the east as tributaries.

Although Wilhelmy was of the opinion that the Yamunā flowed into the Sarasvatī in pre-*Mahābhārata* times, Kar & Ghose have concluded from their analysis of Landsat data that the eastern tributaries of the Sarasvatī were not of a magnitude such as would be expected from the Yamunā. Instead, these authors believe that the topographical evidence suggests that some of the tributaries of the Dṛṣadvatī had been captured by the Yamunā (Kar & Ghose 1984 pp. 222–223).

> The Sarasvatī, taking its rise in the submontane regions of the Ambala district, at present pursuing its feeble course past Kurukshetra, Thāneswar and Pehoā, all of them ancient towns in Punjab, is met by a few other channels and joins the Ghaggar, a more northerly stream, at a place near Shatrāna in Pepsu...
> In Bikaner... the channel is met by another one from a north-eastern direction now known as Naiwāla and identified as an old bed of the Sutlej, which, in ancient times, formed part of the Sarasvatī system (Ghosh 1989 pp. 99–100).

Agrawal & Sood have said that, "as we understand it now the Ghaggar was alive during the pre-Harappan and Harappan periods. But, by the Painted Grey Ware times it must have been dry, or nearly so, since sites of this period are found within the entrenched river bed" (Agrawal & Sood 1993 p. 226). The presence of Painted Grey Ware sites on the dried bed of the Ghaggar had already been pointed out by Ghosh back in 1952 (Misra 1989 p. 158).

According to Misra, there are no Harappan settlements in west Rajasthan, except on the dry bed of the Ghaggar. The southern part of this area is drained by the Luni River where no sites have been found. Harappan sites are also absent in north Gujarat. On the contrary, Pre-Harappan, Early Harappan, Mature Harappan, and Late

Harappan sites were found in the Cholistan desert (Pakistan), a region that has no active streams today. The densest distribution of Harappan sites is not on the Indus River, but on the Ghaggar-Hakra. Moreover, there are no Harappan sites on the Sutlej except in its upper course near the Siwaliks, nor are there any Harappan sites on the Yamunā (Misra 1989 pp. 144–149).

Mughal in turn reports that 414 sites were mapped along 300 miles of the Hakra River bed, which range from the fourth to the first millenniums BCE (Mughal 1989 p. 108).

> The width of the Hakra bed varies from 3 to 10 km in different parts of its course. It was obviously, therefore, a very large river during its lifetime. The large number of settlements found along its course dating broadly to the period 4,000 – 600 BCE also shows that it must have been a perennially flowing mighty river. Today no permanent settlement along its course is possible except where artificial irrigation has been provided. It is also significant that, except in the uppermost part, the river receives no feeders and, therefore, the only source of its waters must have been the rainfall and snowmelt in the Himalayas. No amount of increased rainfall (as compared to today's) could have, however, filled such a wide and enormously long bed...
> It is, therefore, clear that the Ghaggar-Hakra could have flowed as a mighty perennial river from its mouth to the sea only if some other equally large river was flowing in its channel in the past...
> What was this river? And where did it go leaving the Hakra as a dry channel?" (Misra 1989 p. 147).

Climatic fluctuations

In 1977 Gurdip Singh published the results of his palynological study of three lakes in Rajasthan. The climatic sequence based on the pollen record from these three lakes is as follows:

Before 8,000 BCE: arid climate.

8,000 – 7,500 BCE: rainfall was 25 mm more than the present annual precipitation.

7,500 – 3,000 BCE: a slight decline in rainfall, but early evidence of cereals.

3,000 – 1,800 BCE: considerable increase in rainfall, up to 50 cm more than the current rainfall in the arid belt.

1,800 – 1,500 BCE: aridity.

1,500 – 1,000 BCE: slight increase of humidity, but basically arid (cited in Misra 1989 pp. 126–128).

On the period 7,500 – 3,000 BCE, Singh comments that "a noteworthy feature of this phase is an extraordinary rise in carbonized vegetable remains in the lake sediments at all sites. This rise is accompanied by the appearance of the *Cerealia* type of pollen. These two phenomena indicate scrub burning, which probably formed the basis of a primitive cereal agriculture" (op.cit. p. 127).

When reporting his findings for the 3,000 – 1,800 BCE period, Singh remarks that "the presence of *Cerealia* type pollen of the same size range in pre-Harappan levels at Kalibangan together with the unbroken record of *Cerealia* type pollen in the pollen profiles and the evidence of forest burning from three different sites would lead one to believe that cereal cultivation, perhaps, does not start with the Indus Valley Civilization after all. It would seem, in fact, that the practice had existed in the region for a long time, indeed, as has been suggested, from the beginning of Phase iii [7,500 – 3,000 BCE]" (ibid).

Misra goes along with Singh's analysis saying that, after having examined the stratigraphic record at several salt lakes and numerous sand dunes in Rajasthan for five years, "I am aware that the sedimentological evidence supports the palynological one for an increase in rainfall during the Holocene period though the degree and duration of

this increase is a matter of debate" (op.cit. p. 129).

Shaffer & Lichtenstein have presented a chart of recalibrated dates, in which Singh's period of increased rainfall (3,000 – 1,800 BCE) actually corresponds to 4,000 – 3,100 BCE (Shaffer & Lichtenstein 1989 p. 121). From this they conclude that,

> the Harappan phenomena appeared during a period of increasing aridity... and not during a period of increased rainfall... Harappan and other contemporary groups were operating not in an era of climatic opportunity but in one of increasing climatic stress, a period in other words which certainly affected food producing strategies. Another important environmental factor affecting food production is the degree of hydrological change in the Indus Valley... Sometime between ca. 1,900 – 1,700 BCE the Yamuna River shifted its flow eastward... In addition, according to some scholars, parts of the southern Indus Valley may have experienced recurrent and disastrous flooding caused by tectonic uplifting at ca. 2,000 BCE (ibid.).

Based on a study of the world climate from 8,000 to 0 BCE conducted by Lamb, Lewis, and Woodroffe and published in 1966 by the Royal Meteorological Society, Ramaswamy has studied the monsoon patterns in west India and in Pakistan between 2,000 and 500 BCE. The following are his conclusions:

> During the south-west monsoon seasons around 2000–500 BC deep troughs in the upper westerlies must have extended into west Pakistan far more frequently than they do now, inducing monsoon activity and also causing any monsoon depressions from the Bay of Bengal moving towards longitude 78° E [central India] to curve to the north or north-east. These developments would have caused frequent active monsoon conditions over the entire Indus Valley, which is basically a fertile region. Thick vegetations and marsh jungles inhabited by fauna as described by archaeologists and intermittent floods in the Indus and its tributaries would, therefore, have characterized the period of the Harappan civilization.
> These conclusions are further supported by the recent discovery of considerable reserves of ground water in the arid region of extreme west Rajasthan close to the

Indus Valley. Carbon-14 tests carried out by staff of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Bombay at a place called Palana, 14 miles south of Bikaner, indicate that the ground water there is about 5,000 years old, this being the upper limit of the true age of water (Ramaswamy 1968 p. 629).

If tigers and elephants are abundant in Harappan seals, one may infer that the climate must have been different in those times from what it is today in the Panjab. And this idea indeed has been suggested by some scholars.

> A considerable number of Harappan seals depict a manly hero grasping a tiger on either side by the throat. In Mesopotamian art, the fight with lions and/or bulls is the most popular motif. The substitution of tigers for lions in the Indus Valley is undoubtedly in order to bring the scene into agreement with the local fauna, as Ernest Mackay [in 1938] has suggested (Parpola 1984 p. 177).

> At Harappan sites ivory is plentiful. Ivory tusks were found at Mohenjo-daro, Chandu-daro, Lothal, and Surkotada. Large numbers of objects come from Harappa, Mohenjo-daro and Chandu-daro, whereas Lothal and Surkotada have also produced some ivory. Ivory is indeed so common at Mohenjo-daro, that bone takes second place to it. In the Harappan culture ivory was used for objects of everyday use such as containers, combs, kohl-sticks, pins, awls, hooks, toggles, gamesmen, 'batons', rods, scales, plaques, dice, inlay, furniture fittings, and personal ornaments...
>
> Originally, elephants were probably distributed over almost the entire Indian subcontinent except the Thar desert. The elephant, judging from its frequent appearance on Harappan seals, was either sacred to or very popular with the Harappans. The animal is usually accurately carved, often with a rug or covering cloth depicted on its back. Thus it is likely that elephants were not merely hunted for their ivory, but were tamed, In this connection, we may mention the occurrence of elephant bones at Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Rupar, and Lothal...
>
> For the Harappans it was a common material for everyday objects, which indicates

that ivory was cheap and therefore easily available...
[There is] a reference in the Jaina canonical literature to ivory trade being in the hands of the Tankana Mlecchas of northern India, who transported ivory and gold to the Deccan (Ratnagar 1981 pp. 113–115).

Landsat imagery

The black and white Landsat imagery of the western part of India and contiguous part of Pakistan, taken in band 7 (near infra-red) of the MSS [multispectral scanner] in the year 1972 clearly indicates the wide valley of the Saraswati running from Suratgarh through Anupgarh to Fort Abbas and Ahmadpur East. However, from Anupgarh another wide belt of discontinuous patches of dark grey tone runs southwestward up to Sakhi. From Sakhi, the remnant of a former valley can be traced towards the west, but a closer look at the imagery reveals the presence of a narrow zone of saline/alkaline fields, partly obliterated by the overlying sand dunes, extending up to Khangarh. To the south of Khangarh, a narrow strip of green vegetation, producing a slightly darker tone than the surroundings can be identified... This was the course of the Saraswati from the Himalaya to the Rann of Kutch after the river severed relations with the Luni. South of Mihal Mungra, the course could be traced up to the present Hakra channel and there are indications of its having even crossed the Hakra channel. This signifies that the course of the old Saraswati might have been somewhere to the west of the present Hakra...
It has also been possible to trace out from the Landsat imagery a number of minor westward shifts in the course from Ghotaru southward. The other major courses of the Saraswati could be identified further to the west, through Mithra and Sandh, the remnants of which are now known as the Raini and the Wahinda rivers. Here also the [Sarasvatī] river shifted its course several times and, at one time, flowed to the east of the Wahinda river, through Mundo. Finally, the [Sarasvatī] river ceased to flow southward and met the Sutlej to the west of Ahmadpur East (Ghose et al. 1979 p. 448).

Pal et al. have published the results of their study based on visual interpretation of the Landsat imagery during the years 1972–1977 (Pal et al. 1989). They first describe

the Sutlej system. Rising in the Himalayas, the present Sutlej River takes a sharp turn to the west near Ropar. It continues to flow westward for more than 150 km until it is joined by the Beas, which comes from the northeast. Only after this confluence the Sutlej turns southwest.

The sharp westward bend in the course of the Sutlej is suggestive of its diversion in the past, as no physical obstruction has been reported which could be responsible for this diversion. Moreover, there is a sudden widening of the Ghaggar Valley, which can be explained only if a major tributary was joining the Ghaggar at this place. The satellite imagery does show a major paleo-channel joining the Ghaggar here.

Pal et al. state that three main causes could be responsible for the diversion of the Sutlej: [1] tectonic uplift which forced the Sutlej to abandon its channel and to start flowing westward (their hypothesis); [2] capture of the Sutlej by a tributary of the river Beas through headwork erosion (Wilhelmy's hypothesis); [3] existence of a fault through which the Sutlej diverted.

They feel that the tectonic movements are clearly demonstrated by the multitude of small channels into which the Sutlej braided until it found its present course. And the add that, "The braiding of the Sutlej seems to have been echoed in a legend related in the *Mahābhārata* which says that when Vasiṣṭha threw himself into the Sutlej to commit suicide the river broke up into a hundred channels" (op. cit. p. 175; Agrawal & Sood 1993 p. 226). And in fact, I may add, the Sanskrit name of the Sutlej, *śatadru*, means "running as a hundred."

They examined also the Landsat imagery of the Indus system and concluded that the confluence of the Sutlej with the Indus may not be an ancient feature. There is a distinct paleo-channel, which seems to suggest that at some point in time the Sutlej flowed through the Nara directly into the Rann of Kutch.

Now regarding the Ghaggar system Pal et al. observed that its ancient bed has a constant width of 6 to 8 km; there is a paleo-channel southeast of the river Markanda, where the present Sarasvatī flows; another channel, which corresponds to the present Chautang seems to join the Ghaggar near Suratgarh; near Anupgarh the ancient Ghaggar bed bifurcates and both paleo-channels come to an abrupt end; they don't see any paleo-channel connecting the ancient Ghaggar with the Indus or with the Luni; yet there are three channels between the Yamunā and the Ghaggar (op. cit. pp. 176–179).

> If one examines the old bed of the Ghaggar (Sarasvati), it shows a peculiar feature: it tends to flow along straight lines joined together at sharp angles. Obviously this reflects a structural control as the old Ghaggar seems to have flowed into an unstable channel controlled by the lineaments, probably enechelon faults. It might have required only a little tectonic movement to disturb its previous course and force it into its present channel (op. cit. pp. 174–175).
>
> The chain of tectonic events which diverted the Sutlej westward and the Paleo-Yamuna south-eastward was perhaps also responsible for the subsidence near Marot and Beriwala into which the Ghaggar seems to have vanished. This alone can explain the 'death' of such a mighty river into a lake because its main feeders, the Sutlej and the Paleo-Yamuna, were weaned away from it by the Indus and the Ganges, respectively (op. cit. p. 177).

What follows below is a report that shows how the analysis of Landsat imagery can be supplemented with field investigation:

> Remote sensing data interpretation of the area [Thar desert] besides the study of geological, physiographical, meteorological, mythological and archaeological findings have been carried out to explore the possibility of the existence of a river system in the past in this area. Interpretation of Landsat TM and IRS images on 1:250,000 scale using visual techniques and aerial photo-interpretation of selected tracts was followed by verification of interpreted signatures... Geo-electrical

> sounding and groundwater drilling at aerial photo-interpreted palaeo-courses with ground truth [sic] have been exercised southeast of Rajgarh in order to establish applicability of palaeo-courses in Thar desert as a source for groundwater... Groundwater-level in Kantli [a tributary to the Sarasvatī] area varies from 30 to 40 meters below ground level. Field investigation shows that area possesses low salinity compared to its immediate vicinity (Tiwari 1992 pp. 70, 74).

The various analyses of groundwater resources and well water in the area where Sarasvatī would flow in her young age seem to indicate that she, if underground, is still running there. As we shall see in the chapter on the *Mahābhārata* evidence, Sarasvatī disappears from people's sight only to go underground and thereby avoid to be touched by non-*āryas*. The report below, from field investigation, adds a few more details about Sarasvatī's third, or current, age:

> The few wells along the tract provide additional evidence in support of the earlier course of the Saraswati. At Dharmi Khu, Ghantial, Ghotaru and to the west of Shargarh the wells have sweet water at 30 to 40 m depth... and there is no report of the well drying up even during severe droughts... suggesting a continuous supply of water from the upstream side. In contrast, the wells away from the old courses of the Saraswati river have insufficient water and are mostly blackish or saline... Hence it may be suggested that the present subsurface hydrology of the region is mainly controlled by precipitation in the catchment of the Saraswati in the Himalaya...
> "We suggest that the alluvium in the extreme western part of the desert was contributed by the Saraswati river, and that the surface water in the western part of this desert is mainly derived from precipitation in the Himalaya flowing subterraneously through the former courses of the Saraswati (Ghose et al. 1979 pp. 449–450).

Where was the Sarasvatī?

Whether or not the climate during Harappan times was more humid than what it

is now in the area, it seems plausible that there was also irrigation. And if that is the case the Western Yamunā Canal may have been already part of an old irrigation network meant to serve the Sarasvatī area at a time when the river had already collapsed as a consequence of seismic activity, changes in the course of the Sutlej, etc. According to Bharadwaj the Western Yamunā Canal was re-excavated in 1356 on the ancient western branch of the Yamunā, which he identifies with the Dṛṣadvatī (Bharadwaj 1991 ch. 3; Bhargava 1964). What the remains are of an older irrigation system in today's geography, and how they are to be differentiated from old beds of natural rivers is something I can't tell.

In 1983–4 MAFI (Indo-French Archaeological Mission) undertook a survey of the area between the Yamunā and the Sutlej. From their geomorphological observations they conclude: "It is hard to accept that the Yamunā river bed abruptly changed course only 5,000 years ago, especially when one remembers... the terraces" (Gentelle 1986 p. 105).

> If the Yamunā did not flow west during the Harappan period, the Pleistocene paleo-flows such as the Chautang depression or the depression which today makes up part of the Ghaggar, were hardly more active 5,000 years ago then they are today. Thus it is necessary to look for another possible cause to explain regular and abundant supply of water to the series of archaeological sites found in the plain. For the Chautang region at least, the only possible explanation is that extensive irrigation once existed in the area (ibid.).

As the Indo-French group found traces of many canals and as through soil analysis they found that, "from top to bottom of this upper sequence the gradual increase of the quartz sand grain content is the consequence of an endless reworking of the same materials and results in a lessening of fertility of the soils developed over the last five

thousand years", the author of the report concludes:

> We shall take care not to forget that the use in Bactria of long canals measuring about twenty kilometers and constructed thanks to the remarkable knowledge of hydraulic techniques, as has been demonstrated in the Ai Khanoum plain and at Shortugai, has been ascribed to a small social unit having close ties with the Indus valley civilizations. The question about the origin of these irrigation techniques has not yet been answered (Gentelle 1986 p. 110).

Ghose et al. have studied the region west of the Aravallis between the Luni and the Ghaggar rivers, which is mainly covered with alluvium:

> The Luni river system drains only a small area in the southern part of the desert, and its catchment is not so vast as to account for the alluvial deposit in the northern part of the desert. The role of any Himalayan river in the alluviation process has never been thought of except for the northern fringe of the desert where several authors have mentioned the existence of the dry valley of a Himalayan river — the Ghaggar or the Saraswati of the Vedic period (Ghose et al. 1980 p. 8).

These authors state that the water of the Luni River, the only major river in the desert of Rajasthan, "is not sufficient to maintain well-defined channels from their headwaters to the Rann of Kutch". Moreover, "below Pachpatra, the Luni takes a sharp right angular bend to the south which cannot be attributed to any structural control such as a fault or lithological barrier." From these observations Ghose et al. conclude that, "the present valley segment of the Luni between Pachpadra and the Rann of Kutch was not formed by discharge from the Luni system alone. For the maintenance of this course some other northern stream was responsible, to which the Luni was only a tributary" (op. cit. p. 9).

Here Ghose's observations differ from those of Pal et al. cited above:

Interpretation of aerial photographs and ERTS imagery have shown marks of several dead drainage channels oriented towards the Luni river bend at Pachpatra. At their upstream end these disjoined and buried courses are linked with the Ghaggar, or the river Saraswati of the Vedic period. It is interesting to note that the disjoined segments meet the Saraswati near Nohar, where it takes a sharp bend towards the west (Ghose et al. 1980 p. 9).

From the evidence available to them Ghose et al. have suggested that the river Sarasvatī changed her course in a westward direction at least four times since the Pleistocene. During the early Holocene, the Sarasvatī "severed its relation with the Luni at Pachpadra and discharged into the Rann of Kutch through another southerly course whose remnants are known in Pakistan as Hakra or Nara" (op. cit. p. 10). Another major change took place during the Holocene, when the Sarasvatī began discharging her waters into the Indus instead of running all the way to Kutch. Furthermore, from photographic imagery Ghose et al. have found as well that the Sutlej, which appears to have been a tributary of the Sarasvatī in ancient times, shifted its course several times.

I may add here that if the lower course of the Sarasvatī was initially part of today's Luni River, the most ancient Sarasvatī's mouth would be found not too far from Prabhāsa. Yet to match the descriptions given in the *Mahābhārata* (MBh 3.86.17–21) the lost city of Dvārakā would need to be at the archaeological site presently called Dholavira and Prabhāsa, as I said, not too far from the mouth of the Luni River. In MBh 3.16.5–20, for example, Dvārakā is described as a fortress with bridges and boat traffic.

prakṛtyā viṣamam durgam prakṛtyā ca surakṣitam/
prakṛtyā cāyudhā

"By nature a rough [or odd] fortress [or place of difficult access] and by nature carefully guarded, and naturally causing agitation" (MBh 3.16.17).

CHAPTER 3:
DEFINING SOME KEY CONCEPTS

Note on the English translation of *Ṛg-veda* (RV) and *Mahābhārata* (MBh) stanzas: although I have consulted all the sources listed in the bibliography, I have taken the liberty of editing or redoing the translation of most of the passages quoted in this and the following chapters based on my present understanding.

ārya

From the Sanskrit root √*ṛ* three nouns are derived which are pertinent here: *ārya*, *ṛta*, and *ṛtu*. According to Monier-Williams, the verbal root √*ṛ* may be translated by "to move, rise, tend upwards, go towards, meet with, reach, obtain, excite, erect, raise, hit upon, attack" etc. And the noun *ṛtu* may be translated by "any settled point in time, fixed time, right or fit time, an epoch or season" etc.

ví jānīhy ā́ryān yé ca dásyavo
barhíṣmate randhayā śā́sad avratā́n

"[To Indra:] distinguish between the *āryas* and the *dasyus*, make them submissive to the sacrificer [or worshiper], correct (or punish) the [*dasyus*, who have] no law" (RV 1.51.8).

In this work the noun *ārya* is used to denote a practitioner of a *bráhman*-based ideology (see definition of "ideology" below), a type of ideology that in different texts is referred to as *dharma* or *ṛta*. The term *ārya* here is thus different from "Aryan" when used to denote certain class of languages or ethnicity. In other words, not all Aryans are *āryas*. Needless to say, neither the *Ṛg-veda* nor the *Mahābhārata* have the anglicized form, but only *ārya* (or *arya*).

Aryan in the sense of ethnicity is referred to in the *Ṛg-veda* by the terms *pañca-janāḥ* and *viś ārī* (see RV 1.77.3). Some scholars have taken the term *pañca-janāḥ* to denote the Aryans plus the people of the four quarters of the earth, whereas others believe that it refers to five subdivisions within the Aryans themselves (see Macdonell & Keith 1982 vol. 1 pp. 466–467). This debate cannot be settled unless the exact geographical distribution of the Aryans (and the *āryas*) in RV and MBh times is known.

In RV 6.61.12 Sarasvatī is called *páñca jātā́ vardháyantī*, "he who promotes the five ethnic groups and makes them prosper" whereas in RV 1.108.8 the Yadus, Turvasus, Druhyus, Anus, and Purus are listed. This is further elaborated in MBh 1.80.26, where the following statement is found:

> From Yadu were born the Yādavas; the sons of Turvasu were the Yavanas; Druhyu's sons were called the Bhojas; and Anu begot sons of the *mleccha* class. From Pūru came the Paurava dynasty, in which you [King Janamejaya] were born.

And we learn also from the *Mahābhārata* that the Bharatas and the Kurus are the descendants of "Sarasvatī herself, the goddess of the river" (MBh 1.90.24–40). Regarding the Paurava domain, the following statements are found in the *Mahābhārata*:

MBh 1.62.3–5:

pauravāṇāṃ vaṃśa-karo duḥṣanto nāma vīryavān/
pṛthivyāś catur-antāyā goptā bharata-sattama//
catur-bhāgaṃ bhuvaḥ kṛtsnaṃ sa bhuṅkte manu-jeśvaraḥ/
samudrāvaraṇāṃś cāpi deśān sa samitiñ-jayaḥ//
ā-mlecchāṭavikān sarvān sa bhuṅkte ripu-mardanaḥ/
ratnākara-samudrāntāṃś cātur-varṇya-janāvṛtān//

[3] "A hero named Duḥṣanta helped to establish the old Paurava dynasty, and his

domain, noble Bhārata [Janamejaya], extended to the four ends of the earth.

[4] "Holding sway over the four quarters of the earth, this lord of men gained unquestioned victory on all the ocean-bounded lands.

[5] "A devastator of enemies, Duḥṣanta enjoyed sovereignty over all nations, whether settled by *mlecchas*, forest dwellers, or followers of *cātur-varṇa*, for he ruled [all land] between the jewel-bearing seas" (MBh 1.62.3–5).

mlecchāś ca anye bahu vidhāḥ pūrvaṃ nivikṛtā raṇe.//

āryāś ca pṛthivī pālāḥ.../

"The *mlecchas* and various others formerly disloyal in battle, and the *āryas*, lords of the earth..." (MBh 14.72.24–25).

About the geographical distribution of the *āryas* not much detail is found in the *Ṛg-veda*. RV 10.136.5 speaks as well of two oceans, eastern and western: *ubhaú samudrāv ā́ kṣeti yáś ca pū́rva utā́paraḥ.* Then there is the following stanza, which locates the *āryas* in the area of the seven rivers, i.e. the larger Panjab (see "Various rivers" below):

yó vā́ryāt saptá síndhuṣu |

vádhar dāsásya tuvinṛmṇa nīnamaḥ ||

"[To Indra:] and from [for?] the *ārya* in [the area of] the seven rivers [he who got rid of] the deadly weapon of the *dāsa* (RV 8.24.27).

At some later than Ṛg-vedic time, *Manu-smṛti* defines Brahmāvarta as follows: "That which is between the Sarasvatī and the Dṛṣadvatī, the two divine rivers, that area created by the gods, they call it Brahmāvarta" (2.17). In other words, we are told here that the *kṣetra* of the Kurus, who are undoubtedly *āryas*, was plotted by cosmic

architects. Then there is a contiguous area from Kuru-kṣetra to the land of the Matsyas and Pañcālas, which is also an area of *ṛṣis*: "Kurukṣetra and the area of the Matsyas and of the Pañcālas and of the Śūrasenas, that region of the seers of the *Vedas* (Brahmarṣi-deśa), is contiguous to [and of a little less importance than] Brahmāvarta" (2.19). Then in 2.21 Manu says: "In between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas, what is east of the place of disappearance (*vinaśana*) and west of Prayāga, that is Madhyadeśa." *Madhya-deśa* literally means "the area in between" both in geographical terms — in between Udīcya (north) and Prācya (east) — and in terms of better–worse. Then in 2.22 we find out that "[What extends] from the eastern ocean (*pūrva samudra*) and the western ocean (*paścima*), that area in between the two mountain ranges the sages know as Āryāvarta." (This, incidentally, appears to be the same area referred to in the Ṛg-vedic stanza quoted before, RV 10.136.5 — *paścima* is a synonym of *apara*.) Finally, in 2.23 Manu states that "Where the black antelope wanders around by nature, that is to be known as the area fit for worship (*yajñīya deśa*). Everything else is the area of the *mlecchas*." (My translation of *Manu*.)

It would seem that it is Brahmāvarta indeed what the following Ṛg-vedic stanza is referring to: "I have placed you in the best place of the earth, in the dwelling of Iḷā, at the time of fine weather [or the auspicious time] of the days; by the Dṛṣadvatī, among the descendants of Manu, by the Āpayā, by the Sarasvatī; shine opulently, O Agni" (RV 3.23.4).

dāsa / dasyu

Both *dāsa* and *dasyu* derive from the root √*das*, which Monier-Williams translates by "to suffer want, become exhausted" etc. The noun *dasyu* seems to denote some enemies of the *ārya* gods, whether human or superhuman, or anyone considered

to be inferior to the *āryas* (see Macdonell & Keith 1982 vol. 1 pp. 347–349). Two shared characteristics of the terms *dasyus* and *dāsa* is that they refer to people of hostile or unintelligible speech, and that these people may be either human or superhuman. What sets apart the people called *dāsa* in the *Ṛg-veda* is that they are mentioned in connection with *pur*(as), with *viś*(as), and with *varṇa*, three words whose exact referents are open to discussion (see Macdonell & Keith 1982 vol. 1 pp. 356–358).

In Muir's opinion, *dāsas* and *dasyus* are not to be seen as non-Aryan aborigines. "I have gone over the names of the Dasyus or Asuras mentioned in the R.V. with the view of discovering whether any of them could be regarded as of non-Arian or indigenous origin; but I have not observed any that appear to be of this character" (Muir 1976 pp. 387–388).

ámartyaṃ cid dāsám mányamānam
ávābhinad ukthaír vāvṛdhānáḥ //

"[To Indra:] the *dāsa* who thought himself immortal you, encouraged by the hymns, have punched him down" (RV 2.11.2).

akarmā́ dásyur abhí no amantúr anyávrato ámānuṣaḥ /
tvám̐ tásyāmitrahan vádhar dāsásya dambhaya //

"[To Indra:] the *dasyu* is against us, he who is without [good] deeds, who has no [good] thoughts, who follows other laws, who is not human. You killer of unfriendly [people], outwit the *dāsa*'s weapon" (RV 10.22.8).

ahám̐ śúṣṇasya śnáthitā vádhar yamaṃ
ná yó rará ā́ryaṃ nā́ma dásyave //

"[To Indra Vaikuṇṭha from himself:] I am the piercer of Śuśṇa holding a weapon

[thunderbolt], I am the one who did not give to the *dasyu* the *ārya* name" (RV 10.49.3).

In one *Mahābhārata* passage the people of Āraṭṭa are called *dasyus* and are considered to be outside or devoid of the *bráhman*-based *dharma* for they have raped a chaste woman (see MBh 8.30.58–60). In many a place throughout the *Mahābhārata* the term *dasyu* denotes thieves and robbers, whereas the term *dāsa* denotes domestic servants.

MBh 2.54.16–17:

etāvanty eva dāsānām sahasrāṇy uta santi me/
pradakṣiṇa anulomāś ca prāvāra vasanāḥ sadā//
rājñā medhāvino dakṣā yuvāno mṛṣṭa kuṇḍalāḥ/
ātrī hastā divā rātram atithīn bhojayanty uta/
tad rājan dhanam mahyam tena dīvyāmy aham tvayā//

"[Yudiṣṭhira said:] I have as many thousands of servants as well. They are always respectful and obedient, and are well-dressed in fine coats. These young, with their polished earrings, are experienced, intelligent, and expert, and with plates in their hands, they feed our guests in the day and night as well. This, O king, is wealth to me, and with it I shall gamble with you" (MBh 2.54.16–17).

mleccha

This word is not found in the *Ṛg-veda*. Monier-Williams suggests to translate *mleccha*, from the root √*mlech* or √*mlich*, by "foreigner, barbarian, a person who does not speak Sanskrit" etc. According to Lanman, the root √*mlech* (*mlecchati*) "to speak

unintelligibly" derives from *mlek +sketi* . The Pali cognate of *mleccha* is *milakkha* or *milakkhu*, a term used to describe those who dwell on the outskirts of a village (see Shendge 1977 p. 390). As we have seen above, *mlecchas* are found within Manu's Āryāvarta. A *mleccha* is one who does not speak Sanskrit, who is disconnected from *vāc*, even though his linguistic and ethnic background may be Aryan (Macdonell & Keith 1982 vol. 2 p. 181).

After defining a *mleccha* as a "non-Sanskrit speaking outsider/foreigner" Witzel suggests that this term applies to the "Indus people," who are "unable to speak Vedic Sanskrit" and points out to the Pāli *milakkhu* and the Akkadian *meluḫḫa* as cognates of *mleccha* (Witzel 1995 p. 19). (I may recall here that within Sanskrit itself, and since the *Ṛg-veda*, a similar palatal – velar alternation is found in the declension of the stem *vāc* and in its compound formation as follows: *vāc* ~ *vāk* ~ *vāg*.) On the other hand, it has been suggested by others that *mleccha* may be a cognate of *baluch* (see Pathak 1993 p. 83), although there is a distinct geographical region called *balhi* or *balkh*, whose inhabitants are the *bāhlikas* or *bālhikas*.

In a ritual–oriented society, not to speak the ritual language properly is a serious drawback as this would disqualify the person and render his performance ineffective. The effectiveness of ritual is based on an homology between spoken sound and nature by means of gods, the managers of natural phenomena (see definition of "Ideology" below).

It is quite possible that in the Harappan context a *bráhman*-based and a *prakṛti*-based ideology coexisted — either in the form of dissimilar neighboring populations or of a mixed ideology shared (to different degrees) by the majority of the population. In this regard, I will quote here a statement found in the *Mahābhārata* — this is a conversation between "a dear friend of Vidura who was a professional excavator" and

had been sent by Vidura to help the Pāṇḍavas in confinement, and Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas:

MBh 1.135.4–6:

kṛṣṇa-pakṣe caturdaśyāṃ rātrāv asya purocanaḥ/
bhavanasya tava dvāri pradāsyati hutāśanam//
mātrā saha pradagdhavyāḥ pāṇḍavāh puruṣarṣabhāḥ/
iti vyavasitaṃ pārtha dhārtarāṣṭrasya me śrutam//
kiñcic ca vidureṇokto mleccha-vācāsi pāṇḍava/
tvayā ca tat tathety uktam etad viśvāsa-kāraṇam//

"On the fourteenth evening of the dark fortnight, Purocana will put fire in the door of your house. 'The Pāṇḍavas are leaders of the people, and they are to be burned to death with their mother.' This, Pārtha [Yudhiṣṭhira], is the determined plan of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son, as I have heard it. When you were leaving the city, Pāṇḍava, Vidura spoke a few words to you in the dialect of the *mlecchas*, and you replied to him, 'So be it.' I say this to gain your trust" (MBh 1.135.4–6).

We see here two Aryans by language and ethnicity, Yudhiṣṭhira and Vidura, who are also *āryas*, speaking the language of their neighbor people the *mlecchas* when in need, while other Aryans, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his party, are not *āryas* by behavior. This is explained in another *Mahābhārata* stanza: *na āryā mlecchanti bhāṣābhir māyayā na caranty uta* "*āryas* do not speak with crude dialects like *mlecchas*, nor do they behave with duplicity" (Mbh 2.53.8).

In MBh 1.79.13 the *mlecchas* are said to be meat eaters and to lust after the wives of their own *gurus*, with statements similar to those applied to the Bāhlikas in the Karṇa Parvan. In MBh 8.30.35–47 Karṇa says that the Himālaya, Gaṅgā, Yamunā,

Sarasvatī, and Kurukṣetra have put outside a non-*ārya* people called Bāhlīkas, who live on the other side of the Śatadrukā (Sutlej) and the Irāvatī (Ravi). Those who reside inside the area of the five rivers with the Sindhu as the sixth should avoid the impure outsiders who do not practice a *bráhman*-based *dharma*. The Bāhlikas eat all kinds of meat, drink intoxicating liquors, and allow their women to behave loosely in public. In MBh 8.30.21 a Bāhlika staying in Kurujāṅgala longs for the day when he will be able to go to his own country (*sva deśa*), which lies on the other side of the rivers Śatadrukā and Irāvatī, where he will enjoy the beautiful resident women.

Āraṭṭa is next described as the country with forests of Pīlu in which the five rivers — Śatadru (Sutlej), Vipāśā (Beas), Irāvatī (Ravi), Candrabhāgā (Chenab), Vitastā (Jhelum) — having the Sindhu as the sixth, are gone outside. As there is no practice of *bráhman*-based *dharma* in this country one should not go there. In MBh 8.30.40 the Bāhlikas are called Āraṭṭas. These people are found where the five rivers flow away from the mountains, and no *ārya* should live with them even for two days. In 8.30.47 Karṇa explains that the country is called Āraṭṭa and its people are called Bāhlikas, and in 8.30.58 that the people of Āraṭṭa are called *dasyu*.

Śalya responds to all this saying that in every country it is possible to find some good and some bad people. And indeed from Karṇa's words one gets the impression that there was some measure of overlap in the geographical distributions of *āryas* and *mlecchas*.

In MBh 7.68.37 and 7.87.17 *mlecchas* mounted on elephants fight against Arjuna whereas in the Bhīṣma Parvan the warriors fighting against Arjuna have horses from Āraṭṭa. These *mlecchas* are said to be accompanied by Bāhlikhas, to possess the deceptive powers of the *asuras*, and to be mountain dwellers (MBh 7.68.41–42, 45). Their elephants come from the northern mountains and are ridden by *dasyus* (MBh

7.87.35) whereas, as we saw earlier, in MBh 8.30.58 the people of Āraṭṭa are called *dasyu.* In MBh 9.16.45 all those who are fighting against the Pāṇḍava brothers are considered to be haters of *bráhman.* Then again the *mlecchas* are said to be sinful and to come from Himavat (MBh 7.87.37). Elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata,* however, the *mlecchas* are also found in the islands.

MBh 2.27.25–26:

sa sarvān mleccha nṛ patin sāgara dvīpa vāsinaḥ/
aram āhārayām āsa ratṇāni vividhāni ca//
andana aguru vastrāṇi maṇi muktam anuttamam/
āñcanam rajatam vajram vidrumam ca mahā dhanam//

"[Bhīma] arranged for all the *mleccha* kings, who dwell on the ocean islands, to bring varieties of gems, sandalwood, aloe, garments, and incomparable jewels and pearls, gold, silver, diamonds, and extremely valuable coral... great wealth" (MBh 2.27.25–26).

bráhman (n)

This noun is derived from the root √*bṛh,* "to grow strong, increase" etc. Monier-Williams suggests many possible English translations for *bráhman,* such as: "swelling of the soul, outpouring of the heart in worshiping the gods, the sacred word, the divine essence and source, the self-existent, the eternal" etc. Of the several Sanskrit nouns ending in *-man* — *bráhman, dharman, dhāman, karman,* etc. — it has been stated that they point at powers manifesting themselves in actions, beings, or objects as if these nouns were in fact adjectives denoting the qualities of potent beings or objects (see

Gonda 1950 p. 73).

Gonda has devoted a whole book to *bráhman*, in which he states that "*bráhman* is regarded as the potency or principle from which all things are derived, as the ultimate basis of the world, as one with the true immortality and eternal reality" (Gonda 1950 p. 10). One year earlier Renou had already devoted an article to *bráhman*, a word that in his opinion stands in the *Ṛg-veda* for "hymn" and "word" (*vāc*) only to acquire the value of "universal principle" in the *Atharva-veda*. Thus "*bráhman* [as *vāc*] is an object that imposes itself on the humans, as humans do not manufacture it... it receives the epithet *devadattam* 'given by the gods'... One finds in *bráhman* a force that could be the 'realization' or the 'revelation' of *ṛta*" (Renou 1949 pp. 9–10).

In other words, there is in *bráhman* a potency that utilizes *vāc* to make understandable its own nature, which otherwise is inexpressible (*acíttam bráhma* in RV 1.152.5). And in fact RV 3.51.6, 6.38.3–4, 6.69.4 etc. speak of *bráhmāṇi* / *bráhma giraḥ*, "*bráhman*-related words" whereas RV 8.32.27 speaks of *deváttam bráhma gāyata*, "chanting god-given *bráhman*-related words". The *Mahābhārata* uses quite frequently the expression *brahma-vādin*, one who speaks *bráhman*-related words and who practices a *bráhman*-related *dharma*.

yá imé ródasī ubhé ahám índram átuṣṭavam /
viśvāmitrasya rakṣati bráhmedám bhāratam jánam //

"[To Indra from Viśvāmitra:] I myself have made both worlds, heaven and earth, to be praised, I have made Indra to be praised; this is Viśvāmitra's *bráhman*[-related word] that protects the Bhārata people" or alternatively, "this is the *bráhman* that protects Viśvāmitra's Bhārata people" (RV 3.53.12).

The name *viśvāmitra* literally means "the friend of all." Stanzas 15 and 16 of the

above hymn (RV 3.53) speak about *vāc* and the *pañca-janāḥ*. Furthermore, we find in RV 1.152.6 the expression *bráhma-priya*, which may be taken as "he who is dear to *bráhman*" or "he for whom *bráhman* is very dear." Then the next stanza (RV 1.152.7), as well as RV 5.85.1 and RV 8.1.3, speak about *asmā́kam bráhma*, our *bráhman*. On the other hand, RV 2.23.4, 5.42.9, 6.52.2–3, 7.104.2, 10.125.6 and MBh 9.16.45 speak of other people, the haters of *bráhman*.

We hear also in the *Ṛg-veda* about two "versions" of *bráhman*: the ancient or first, *bráhma pūrvya* (RV 10.13.1), and the new, *bráhma navya* (RV 6.17.13, 6.50.6). This presumably refers to *vāc* and the process of composition of the Vedic hymns. In fact, in a hymn quoted earlier, RV 1.164, after two stanzas dedicated to *vāc* there is a description of *bráhman* as the One who is one by nature or eternally one, *ékaṃ sát*, and of which the learned speak as if it were many, or give it many names — *ékaṃ sád víprā bahudhā́ vadanti* (RV 1.164.46). And the same point is made in Maṇḍala 10:

RV 10.114.5, 8:

suparṇáṃ víprāḥ kaváyo vácobhir
ékaṃ sántam bahudhā́ kalpayanti /

yā́vad bráhma víṣṭhitaṃ tā́vatī vā́k //

"The learned poets, by means of words, have made manifold the bird who is one by nature... as much as *bráhman* is scattered [or extended], so much is *vāc*" (RV 10.114.5, 8).

Commenting on the question raised in RV 1.164.6 — *kím ápi svid ékam*, "who is indeed the One?" — Geldner says that this question is about the original thing (die Urding) and its tangible or comprehensible forms (see Geldner 1951 vol. 33 p. 228). The One appears or manifests himself as the unborn orderer of the world (RV 1.164.6), the

sun (RV 1.164.7), heaven or nature (RV 1.164.8), and time variously expressed as the year, a wheel in heaven, the sun's eye (RV 1.1.64.9–16). The One, die Urding, *tad ekam*, is the only thing existing before the creation of the world (RV 10.129.2). The One is the fixed one in which all beings rest (RV 10.82.6).

In the *Mahābhārata* the idea of *bráhman* being the One is again met with. Thus in the first chapter of the first Parvan the following equation is found: *ṛtam ekākṣaraṃ brahma*, "*bráhman* is *ṛta*, *bráhman* is the one who is imperishable [or the one who is sound or word; the "one" may be either male or female]" (MBh 1.1.20). Later on, *bráhman* will also be stated to be *dharma* and to rest on *puruṣa*.

brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhā aham amṛtasya avyayasya ca/
śāśvatasya ca dharmasya sukhasya aikāntikasya ca.//

"I am the resting place of *bráhman*, of that which is immortal, undecaying, and endless, of that which is *dharma*, happiness, and the complete [or exclusive] one" (MBh 6.36.27).

MBh 6.62.15–17:

etat paramakam guhyam etat paramakam yaśaḥ/
etat paramakam brahma etat paramakam yaśaḥ//
etad akṣaram avyaktam etat tat śāśvatam mahat/
etat puruṣa saṃjñam vai gīyate jñāyate na ca//
etat paramakam teja etat paramakam sukham/
etat paramakam satyam kīrtitam viśva karmaṇā//

[15] "This supreme one is confidential, this supreme one is famous, this supreme one is *bráhman*, this supreme one is famous.

[16] "This is imperishable [or is a sound or word] and imperceptible, this is that

great eternal; this indeed is called *puruṣa* and [as such] is praised but is not known. [17] "This supreme one is fiery energy, this supreme one is happiness, this supreme one is reality [or truth]; it is celebrated by all actions" (MBh 6.62.15–17).

prakṛti

This is another word not found in the *Ṛg-veda*. After checking, in vain, the computer databases for an analysis of the concept of "nature" in the *Ṛg-veda* and after asking Prof. Michael Witzel of Harvard University about an equivalent of *prakṛti* in the *Ṛg-veda*, I have concluded that this is intriguing, and is not an easy task.

According to Monier-Williams this feminine noun, which is derived from *pra-√kṛ*, denotes "nature, the natural form or condition of anything, primary substance, the passive power in the creation of the material world" etc. When referring specifically to the natural or physical world form the macrocosmic to the microcosmic level, the concept of *prakṛti* is usually distinguished from *puruṣa* (as a dichotomy) and from *bráhman*. (both being on different semantic levels).

MBh 6.31.10 — *mayā adhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ sūyate sa-carācaram hetunānena ... jagat viparivartate* — explains that *prakṛti* brings forth all beings, moving and unmoving, and is the cause that keeps the world turning. And MBh 6.36.3–4 speaks of *mahad yoni*, the big womb in which all beings are procreated.

MBh 12.328.12–13:

yo sau yonir hi sarvasya sthāvarasya carasya ca/
aṣṭādaśa guṇam yat tat sattvam sattvavatām vara//
prakṛtiḥ sā parā mahyam rodasī yoga dhāriṇī/
tā satyā amarā ajayyā lokānām ātma saṃjñitā//

"He [Nārāyana] is the womb of everything, of what stands still and of what moves. "That reality [or truth] that has eighteen qualities is the most excellent among all living beings. The highly honored *prakṛti* is the maintainer of the union of heaven and earth. She is real [or truthful], immortal, unconquerable; she is known as the soul of the worlds" (MBh 12.328.12–13).

The above *Mahābhārata* passages have led me to conclude that in RV 3.54, a hymn to the Viśve Devas [all the gods], the poet Prajāpati Viśvāmitra or Prajāpati Vācya or Vāc herself is referring in fact to *prakṛti* when he/she uses the expression *ṛtasya yoni*, "the womb or source of *ṛta*":

RV 3.54.6, 8:

kavír nṛcákṣā abhí ṣīm acaṣṭa ṛtásya yónā víghṛte mádantī |
nā́nā cakrāte sádanaṃ yáthā véḥ samānéna krátunā saṃvidāné ||

víśvéd eté jánimā sáṃ vivikto mahó devā́n bíbhratī ná vyathete |
éjad dhruvám patyate víśvam ékaṃ cárat patatrí víṣuṇaṃ ví jātám ||

[6] "The poet, he who oversees mankind, has seen the womb [or source] of *ṛta*, where two beings [neuter; *ṛta* is also a neuter noun] are rejoicing in abundant ghee. The two of them have made their residence differently, just like the bird has, while sharing a common understanding by having the same purpose.

[8] "The two of them hold all beings and, while bearing the big gods, they don't falter, [because] the One reigns over everything that moves, that is fixed, that is acting, that is feathered, that is manifold from birth" (RV 3.54.6, 8).

The two beings, who turn out to be sisters and to have paired names, are referred to in RV 3.54.3, 4, 10 by the word *rodasī* — a feminine noun that is used only

to mean duality. What is denoted by the word *rodasī* is spelled out in another stanza: *dyā́vāpṛthivī́ ródasī ubhé*, "*rodasī* are both heaven and earth" (RV 2.1.15). Regarding the paired names, there are two nouns in the *Ṛg-veda* that, although in their singular feminine form generally denote the earth ("the big", "the wide"), are sometimes used in a dual sense to denote both heaven and earth: *uru* (fem. = *urvī*) and *mah* (fem. = *mahī*). Thus in RV 1.159.4, a stanza in a hymn dedicated to heaven and earth, *mahī* stands for a pair of sisters that share the same womb and are therefore closely united — *jāmī́ sáyonī mithunā́ sámokasā*.

We learn from RV 1.65.4 that waters are one feature of the womb or source of *ṛta*, whereas in RV 8.59.4 we are told that at the dwelling place of *ṛta* seven sisters are found engaged in pouring out ghee. We are told, furthermore, that Agni by means of *ṛta* has spread out *rodasī*, heaven and earth, which are always cleansed by ghee (RV 5.1.7). Elsewhere the womb or source of *ṛta* is called *sukṛtásya loké*, "the world [or place] of good deeds" (RV 10.85.24).

RV 10.190.1–3:

ṛtáṃ ca satyáṃ cābhī́ddhāt tápaso ádhy ajāyata /
táto rā́try ajāyata tátaḥ samudró arṇaváḥ //
samudrā́d arṇavā́d ádhi saṃvatsaró ajāyata /
ahorātrā́ṇi vidádhad víśvasya miṣató vaśī́ //
sūryācandramásau dhātā́ yathāpūrvám akalpayat /
dívaṃ ca pṛthivī́ṃ ca antárikṣam átho sváḥ //

[1] "Both *ṛta* and *satya* were born from inflamed austerity; from that the night was born, from that the restless ocean.

[2] "From the restless ocean the year was born, the apportioner of the days and

nights, the ruler of every eye blink.

[3] "The creator [or arranger] set in order the sun and the moon each one as the previous one [or as previously done] and heaven and earth and the space in between and indeed the light in the sky" (RV 10.190.1–3).

In the above hymn dedicated to the cosmic creation the word *samudra* (ocean) seems to be a synonymous of *yoni*, the source of *ṛta*, *prakṛti*. In other words, we have found here the highest *samudra*; soon we will come across the atmospheric *samudra* (the four directions) as well as the lowest-level earthly water bodies.

As its presumptive counterpart *prakṛti*, the noun *yoni* / *yonā* is feminine and so is *śakti*, another word to denote nature as the primordial energy in the world. Knowing from Prof. Witzel that there is no single word in the *Ṛg-veda* to refer to *śakti* and *yoni* as well as to the basic elements in the world — whereas *prakṛti* does this double job — a study of nature in the *Ṛg-veda* would perhaps imply looking once again into the gods and their powers, enemies, paraphernalia etc. and how they are compared to various material objects and forces and thus build up a fairly clear idea of the concept of nature. Most likely, furthermore, this difference in language between the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata* — that there is no single Ṛg-vedic counterpart for the *Mahābhārata* word *prakṛti* — is concomitant with an ideological difference regarding the humans–nature relationship, i.e. a variation in the significance of ritual and technology.

ṛta

From the verbal root √*ṛ*, the participle *ṛta* (used as an adjective) may be translated as "proper, right, fit, suitable, honest, worshiped, respected" whereas the neuter noun *ṛta* denotes "fixed or settled order, divine law, truth, faith, sacred action or

custom, righteousness" etc. As it appears from the texts, the term *ṛta* is always used in the *Ṛg-veda* and in the *Mahābhārata* in connection with a *bráhman*-based ideology. Furthermore, there seems to be a special affinity between the word *ṛta* and the kind of *bráhman*-based *dharma* presented in the *Ṛg-veda* and, consequently, the *Mahābhārata*, without dropping the word *ṛta* altogether, will increasingly resort to the word *dharma* itself. A detailed semantic comparison of *ṛta* and *dharma*, though, needs to be the subject of a different work.

While, as we have seen, the verb *ṛ* denotes an upward movement, the concept of *ṛta* entails both the ascent of appropriate prayers and deeds and the down pouring of goods and blessings. The latter movement is referred to in the *Ṛg-veda* by the expression *ṛtasya dhārā*, "the stream [or flood] of *ṛta*."

ṛtáṃ cikitva ṛtám íc cikiddhy
ṛtásya dhā́rā ánu tṛndhi pūrvī́ḥ

"[To Agni:] knowing *ṛta*, understand *ṛta*. indeed. Split open the abundant streams of *ṛta*" (RV 5.12.2).

RV 1.67.5–8:

ajó ná kṣā́ṃ dādhā́ra pṛthivī́ṃ tastámbha dyā́m mántrebhiḥ satyaíḥ /
priyā́ padā́ni paśvó ní pāhi viśvā́yur agne guhā́ gúhaṃ gāḥ //
yá īṃ cikéta gúhā bhávantam ā́ yáḥ sasā́da dhā́rām ṛtásya /
ví yé cṛtánty ṛtā́ sápanta ā́d íd vásūni prá vavācāsmai //

"[To Agni:] he the unborn has maintained the earth; he has upheld earth and heaven by means of mantras that are reality [or truth].

[6] "Please protect the footprints of the cattle; O Agni, the life of everything, the secret is diving into the secret.

[7] "Whoever has recognized him who was in a hiding place, whoever has sat in wait for the stream of *ṛta*,

[8] "those worshipers of *ṛta* who open up [the secret], to him then the treasure has been revealed" (RV 1.67.5–8).

sá śardhad aryó víṣuṇasya jantór

mā́ śiśnádevā ápi gur ṛtáṃ naḥ

"[To Indra:] this bold enemy, averse from the people [the *āryas*], may the phallus worshipers not conceal our *ṛta*" (RV 7.21.5).

RV 4.23.8–10:

ṛtásya hí śurúdhaḥ sánti pūrvī́r ṛtásya dhītír vṛjinā́ni hanti |

ṛtásya ślóko badhirā́ tatarda kárṇā budhānáḥ śucámāna āyóḥ ||

ṛtásya dṛḷhā́ dharúṇāni santi purū́ṇi candrā́ vápuṣe vápūṃṣi |

ṛténa dīrghám iṣaṇanta pṛ́kṣa ṛténa gā́va ṛtám ā́ viveśuḥ ||

ṛtáṃ yemāná ṛtám íd vanoty ṛtásya śúṣmas turayā́ u gavyúḥ |

ṛtā́ya pṛthvī́ bahulé gabhīré ṛtā́ya dhenū́ paramé duhāte ||

"[To Indra or to *ṛta*:] the moistening powers [or the healing herbs] of *ṛta* are manifold. Thoughts of *ṛta* kill the wicked. A hymn in praise of *ṛta*, being understood and being kindled, has overcome the deafness in the ears of Āyu [a personification of life].

[9] "The strongholds of *ṛta* are firm supports; they have many glittering, wonderful forms. By means of *ṛta* the desirous ones have long-lasting nourishment. By means of *ṛta* the cows have returned to *ṛta*.

[10] "Whoever comes to *ṛta* gains *ṛta*. The rushing power of *ṛta* moving quickly

delights in cows. For the sake of *ṛta* the two worlds are broad and deep. For the sake of *ṛta* two most excellent cows give milk" (RV 4.23.8–10).

gúhā satī́r úpa tmánā
prá yác chócanta dhītáyaḥ /
káṇvā ṛtásya dhā́rayā //

"[To Indra from Vatsa Kāṇva:] thoughts, which are in hiding while being real [and thus enduring], come out by nature [spontaneously] glowing [cleansed by heat]. The poets of the Kaṇva family [are glowing and cleansed] by the stream of *ṛta*" (RV 8.6.8).

The *Ṛg-veda* is a collection of poetic hymns. It is not easy for someone so far removed from the time and place of its composition to get a clear idea of the referent of every word in the *Ṛg-veda*, although every word in it seems to be serving a purpose. On the other hand, the *Mahābhārata*, not a familiar voice in our daily world either, contains much of *sāṅkhya*-styled definitions — if blending in, that is, many a play on words.

dhāma sāro hi lokānām ṛtam ca eva vicāritam/
ṛta dhāmā tato vipraiḥ satyaś ca aham prakīrtitaḥ//

"Indeed *ṛta* is considered the established order [or power] and the substance [or essence] of the worlds. Thus *ṛta* as the established order is praised by the learned, and I am being truthful" (MBh 12.330.4).

In the *Mahābhārata* the equivalent of the Ṛg-vedic *ṛta* is the concept of *dharma*, although the word *ṛta* in many *Mahābhārata* passages denotes in fact the truth and truthful words. Even if *ṛta* and *dharma* are "equivalent" however, there may not necessarily be a one-to-one correspondence between them. Thus, for example, there

seems to be a semantic difference in the verbal roots the two words are derived from. This is something that needs to be examined closely.

dharma

The nouns *dharman* (neuter) in the *Ṛg-veda* and *dharma* (masculine) in the *Mahābhārata* are derived from the root √*dhṛ*, which may be translated as "to hold, carry, maintain, endure, possess, employ, preserve, restrain" etc. Unlike the root √*ṛ* underlying in the concept of *ṛta*, this root √*dhṛ* refers to the results of a movement or process, or alternatively to its foundation and background, not to the movement itself. Interestingly, both roots end in the same vowel [*ṛ*], which remains as such in *ṛta*, but takes its Guṇa grade [*ar*] in *arya* and *dharma*, and still its Vṛddhi grade [*ār*] in *ārya*. The participle *dhṛta* used as an adjective and paralleling *ṛta* is also found in the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata*, and the latter shows as well the derivative adjective *dharmya* .

From Monier-Williams I gather that there are three main meanings of the word *dharma*: [1] essence, nature, truth, reality — of a natural phenomenon, of a person, of a social group, of the cosmos; [2] the established order of things; arrangement, disposition; [3] prescribed conduct, duty, virtue.

I am suggesting here that, although *dharma* denotes in the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata* a *bráhman*-based, *vaidika* ideology, it could perhaps be used as a generic term to refer to any ideology as a mechanism to articulate reality and define right-and-wrong, insider vs. outsider, what seems "logic", what "makes sense", what is "natural", etc. (see "Ideology" below). Yet before moving on to the suggested generic usage of the word *dharma* I shall briefly survey the textual sources.

ṛténa ṛtáṃ dharúṇaṃ dhārayanta

yajñásya śāké paramé vyóman |

divó dhárman dharúṇe sedúṣo nṝn

jātaír ájātām̐ abhí yé nanakṣúḥ ||

"[To Agni:] by means of *ṛta* the maintainers are supporting [of] *yajña* in the friendly powerful and highest [remotest, most excellent] heaven. The *dharman* of heaven has placed the humans on the foundation; they [the maintainers] have approached [of] the unborn ones by means of the born ones" (RV 5.15.2).

yáḥ puṣpíṇīś ca prasvàś ca dhármaṇā

ádhi dāne vy àvánīr ádhārayaḥ

"[To Indra:] you have maintained by means of *dharman* the flower bearing and the fruitful [plants] in the pasture, and the separate river beds" (RV 2.13.7).

vibhrā́ḍ bṛhát súbhṛtaṃ vājasā́tamaṃ

dhárman divó dharúṇe satyám árpitam |

amitrahā́ vṛtrahā́ dasyuhántamaṃ

jyótir jajñe asurahā́ sapatnahā́ ||

"[To Sūrya:] the big [mighty] luminous one is well protected and is the most victorious [granting most strength]; *dharman* [is] of heaven, [it is] fixed on reality [or truth] in the supporting [place]. [As] the killer of the unfriendly, the killer of Vṛtra, mostly the killer of the *dasyu*, the killer of the *asura* [a superhuman enemy of the gods], the killer of the rival, light was born" (RV 10.170.2).

I will now turn to the *Mahābhārata*. Since the references to *dharma* are in this text extremely frequent, I have selected one passage that seems to help define and contextualize this concept. I will end this section on *dharma* by quoting a passage that

describes its manifest effects.

MBh 12.128.5–6:

guhyam mā dharmam aprākṣīr atīva bharata ṛṣabha/
apṛṣṭo na utsahe vaktum dharmam enam yudhiṣṭhira//
dharmo hy aṇīyān vacanād buddheś ca bharata ṛṣabha/
śrutvā upāsya sad ācāraiḥ sādhur bhavati sa kvacit//

"[Bhīṣma to Yudhiṣṭhira:] you have not asked excessively about *dharma*, which is [a] confidential [subject], O Bharata bull, Yudhiṣṭhira; unless inquired, I do not have the power [or the courage] to speak about this [topic, namely] *dharma*.
[6] "Indeed *dharma* is more fine [or subtle] than any advice [stated in words] and more fine than analytical intelligence; having heard and having worshiped, by means of proper conduct anyone becomes a *sādhu* [sage, virtuous person]" (MBh 12.128.5–6).

From the above passage I gather that the practitioners of a *bráhman*-based *dharma* are called *sādhus* (from the root √*sadh* "to go straight, to be successful") whereas, as we saw earlier, the practitioners of *ṛta* are called *āryas* (both words from the same root).

MBh 2.30.1–5:

rakṣaṇād dharma rājasya satyasya paripālanāt/
śatrūṇām kṣapaṇāc caiva sva karma niratāḥ prajāḥ//
balīnām samyag ādānād dharmataś ca anuśāsanāt/
nikāma varṣī parjanyaḥ sphīto jana pado abhavat/
sarva ārambhāḥ supravṛttā go rakṣam karṣaṇam vanik/

viśeṣāt sarvam eva etat samjajñe rāja karmaṇaḥ//

dasyubhyo vañcakebhyo vā rājan prati paras param/

rāja vallabhataś caiva na aśrūyanta mṛṣā giraḥ//

avarṣam ca ativarṣam ca vyādhi pāvaka mūrchanam/

sarvam etat tadā na āsīt dharma nitye yudhiṣṭhire//

[1] "Yudhiṣṭhira was a king of virtue, and because he protected the people, carefully guarding the truth, and destroying his enemies, all creatures were free to perform their own duties.

[2] "He took tribute in the right measure, and because he consistently ruled in accord with *dharma*, Parjanya sent rain as the people desired and the humankind grew rich.

[3] "All endeavors prospered, especially cow protection, agriculture and trade, and all this manifested by the king's good work.

[4] "Neither from robbers or cheaters, nor from those receiving royal gifts among themselves, were false words ever heard about the king.

[5] "There was no lack of rain, nor excessive rain, nor prevalence of disease or heavy wind, when the ever-righteous Yudhiṣṭhira was king" (MBh 2.30.1–5).

vāc

The feminine noun *vāc* is derived from the root √*vac* (*vakti* or *vivakti*), which Monier-Williams translates by "to speak, utter, declare, describe" etc. The noun *vāc* is found in the *Ṛg-veda* and in the *Mahābhārata*, where it denotes "sound, voice, speech, language, word, statement" etc. In both texts this noun is used as well to refer to the deity of speech and the personification of the *Vedas*.

One thing I mentioned earlier is the intimate connection between *vāc* and *bráhman*. A relevant passage, quoted above in the section on *bráhman*, says: "The learned poets, by means of words, have made manifold the bird who is one by nature... as much as *bráhman* is scattered [or extended], so much is *vāc*" (RV 10.114.5, 8). Another point is that, in the *Ṛg-veda* as well, *vāc* is said to dwell in the highest, remotest, the most excellent heaven, *parama vyoman* (RV 1.164.34–35).

Having stated that, we can move on while I endeavor to put in English words some of the esoteric features of the primeval word. Two hymns in the *Ṛg-veda* are dedicated to *vāc* — 10.71 and 10.125. Of the former, Gonda has said: "All that which the poets left as understood in the form of half-veiled elements, words with double meanings, throughout the hymns, is codified so to say in this poem" (quoted in Patton 1990 p. 183).

RV 10.71.1–11:

bṛ́haspate prathamám̐ vācó ágram yát praírata nāmadhéyam̐ dádhānāḥ /
yád eṣām̐ śréṣṭham̐ yád ariprám ā́sīt preṇā́ tád eṣām̐ níhitam̐ gúhāvíḥ //
sáktum iva títaünā punánto yátra dhī́rā mánasā vā́cam ákrata /
átrā sákhāyaḥ sakhyā́ni jānate bhadraíṣām̐ lakṣmī́r níhitā́dhi vācí //
yajñéna vācáḥ padavī́yam āyan tā́m ánv avindann ṛ́ṣiṣu právistām /
tā́m ābhṛ́tyā vy àdadhuḥ purutrā́ tā́m̐ saptá rebhā́ abhí sám̐ navante //
utá tvaḥ páśyan ná dadarśa vā́cam utá tvaḥ śṛṇván ná śṛṇoty enām /
utó tvasmai tanvàm̐ ví sasre jāyéva pátya uśatī́ suvā́sāḥ //
utá tvam̐ sakhyé sthirápītam āhur naínam̐ hinvanty ápi vā́jineṣu /
ádhenvā carati māyáyaiṣá vā́cam̐ śuśruvā́m̐ aphalā́m apuṣpā́m //
yás tityā́ja sacivídam̐ sákhāyam̐ ná tásya vācy ápi bhāgó asti /

yád īṃ śṛṇóty álakaṃ śṛṇoti nahí pravéda sukṛtásya pánthām //

akṣaṇvántaḥ kárṇavantaḥ sákhāyo manojavéṣv ásamā babhūvuḥ /

ādaghnā́sa upakakṣā́sa u tve hradā́ iva snā́tvā u tve dadṛśre //

hṛdā́ taṣṭéṣu mánaso javéṣu yád brāhmaṇā́ḥ saṃyájante sákhāyaḥ /

átrā́ha tvaṃ ví jahur vedyā́bhir óhabrahmāṇo ví caranty u tve //

imé yé nā́rvā́ṅ ná paráś cáranti ná brāhmaṇā́so ná sutékarāsaḥ /

tá eté vā́cam abhipádya pāpáyā sirī́s tántraṃ tanvate áprajajñayaḥ //

sárve nandanti yaśásā́gatena sabhāsāhéna sákhyā sákhāyaḥ /

kilbiṣaspṛ́t pituṣáṇir hy èṣām áraṃ hitó bhávati vā́jināya //

ṛcā́ṃ tvaḥ póṣam āste pupuṣvā́n gāyatráṃ tvo gāyati śákvarīṣu /

brahmā́ tvo vádati jātavidyā́ṃ yajñásya mā́trāṃ ví mimīta u tvaḥ //

"[To *vāc* or knowledge:] O Bṛhaspati, that was the first part of *vāc* [when] they came forth giving names; what was their best, the spotless, that which was kept in secret [in their hearts] has been revealed with affection.

[2] "Where as if winnowing grain through a sieve the wise have made *vāc* by means of the mind, there friends recognize their friendship; they place an auspicious mark on *vāc*.

[3] "By means of *yajña* they followed the tracks of *vāc* and found she had entered in the sages; they brought her back and distributed her in many places; seven singers praise her in unison.

[4] "Some people, while seeing, do not see *vāc*; some, while hearing, do not hear [of] her; to some she gave her body, like a well-dressed wife to her husband.

[5] "They say that some are steadfast [having strong protection] in friendship, they are not overpowered in contests; [whereas another] goes about with a power of an illusion that is not a cow; [for the latter] hearing *vāc* has no fruit and no flower.

[6] "He who abandons a friend, his fellow in knowledge, does not share a portion in *vāc*; if he hears her, he hears in vain; indeed he does not know the ways of good deeds.

[7] "Friends, having [similar] eyes and ears, were unequal in swiftness of mind; some appear like ponds that reach up to the mouth and to the armpit, some are good for bathing.

[8] "In the products by the heart, in the speed by the mind, the *brāhmaṇa* friends worship that together; some are wittingly left behind, some go far by the power of *bráhman*.

[9] "Those who do not move about on this side [earth] or on the other side [heaven] are no *brāhmaṇas* nor do they participate in *soma*; they approach *vāc* sinfully and, without understanding, they spread out the waters as if weaving threads.

[10] "All friends rejoice with the friend who returns with fame, with the support of the assembly; he removes their faults, he bestows their food, he is fit for the contest.

[11] "One sits multiplying the wealth of the verses; one chants the [Sama] chant in the *śakvarī* meters; one, the *brahmán*, speaks the knowledge of whatever exists; one lays out the measure of the *yajña* " (RV 10.71.1–11).

RV 10.125.1–8:

ahám rudrébhir vásubhiś carāmy ahám ādityaír utá viśvádevaiḥ /
ahám mitrā́váruṇobhā́ bibharmy ahám indrāgnī́ ahám aśvínobhā́ //
ahám sómam āhanásam bibharmy ahám tváṣṭāram utá pūṣáṇam bhágam /
ahám dadhāmi dráviṇam havíṣmate suprāvyè yájamānāya sunvaté //

ahám rā́ṣṭrī saṃgámanī vásūnāṃ cikitúṣī prathamā́ yajñíyānām /
tā́m mā devā́ vy àdadhuḥ purutrā́ bhū́riṣṭhātrām bhū́ry āveśáyantīm //
máyā só ánnam atti yó vipáśyati yáḥ prā́ṇiti yá īṃ śṛṇóty uktám /
amantávo mā́ṃ tá úpa kṣiyanti śrudhí śruta śraddhivám te vadāmi //
ahám evá svayám idáṃ vadāmi júṣṭaṃ devébhir utá mā́nuṣebhiḥ /
yáṃ kāmáye táṃ-tam ugráṃ kṛṇomi tám brahmā́ṇaṃ tám ṛ́ṣiṃ táṃ sumedhā́m //
aháṃ rudrā́ya dhánur ā́ tanomi brahmadvíṣe śárave hántavā́ u /
aháṃ jánāya samádaṃ kṛṇomy aháṃ dyā́vāpṛthivī́ ā́ viveśa //
aháṃ suve pitáram asya mūrdhán máma yónir apsv àntáḥ samudré /
táto ví tiṣṭhe bhúvanā́nu víśvā utā́mūṃ dyā́ṃ varṣmáṇópa spṛśāmi //
ahám evá vā́ta iva prá vāmy ārábhamāṇā bhúvanāni víśvā /
paró divā́ pará enā́ pṛthivyā́ etā́vatī mahinā́ sám babhūva //

"[To *vāc*, the powerful, from *vāc*:] I go with the Rudras, with the Vasus, I go with the Adityas, and with all the gods; I support both Mitra and Varuṇa, both Indra and Agni, the two Aśvins.

[2] "I support the exuberant Soma, Tvaṣṭar, Pūṣan, and Bhaga; I pour wealth on the offerer of oblation, on the mindful worshiper, on the presser of *soma*.

[3] "I am the queen, the gatherer of treasures, the full of wisdom, the first one among the worshipers; the gods have placed me variously for I have many places [or positions], I have taken on many forms.

[4] "By me he eats his food, he who sees, who breathes, who hears what has been said; without being aware of me, he rests on me; listen to what is taught, I speak to you what is worthy of faith.

[5] "Indeed I speak that very thing that is liked by the gods and the humans; he whom I love, that one I make terribly powerful, that one I make a *brāhmaṇa*, that

one a *ṛṣi*, that one a wise sage.

[6] "I stretch the bow for Rudra so that the hater of *bráhman* be killed with his arrow; I cause strife among people; I pervade both heaven and earth.

[7] "I bring forth the father in the summit of this [world]; my womb is in the water, in the internal ocean; then I spread myself over all the worlds, and touch heaven with the forehead.

[8] "I breathe out strongly like the wind while holding all the worlds; I am beyond heaven, beyond the earth, so great and powerful I was born" (RV 10.125.1–8).

RV 1.164.42, 45:

> *tásyāḥ samudrā́ ádhi ví kṣaranti   téna jīvanti pradíśaś cátasraḥ |*
> *tátaḥ kṣaraty akṣáraṃ   tád víśvam úpa jīvati ||*
>
> *catvā́ri vā́k párimitā padā́ni   tā́ni vidur brāhmaṇā́ yé manīṣíṇaḥ |*
> *gúhā trī́ṇi níhitā néṅgayanti   turī́yaṃ vācó manuṣyā̀ vadanti ||*

"[To *vāc* and the waters:] from her flow the oceans here and there; by this live the four directions; from this [parama vyoman, "the highest heaven"] flows out the immutable [or the syllable]; upon this everything lives.

[45] "In four quarters is measured *vāc*; the *brāhmaṇas* who know these [four], they are thoughtful; three of them are kept in secret and do not shake; the fourth *vāc*, the humans speak" (RV 1.164.42, 45).

RV 8.100.10–11:

> *yád vā́g vádanty avicetanā́ni   rā́ṣṭrī devā́nāṃ niṣasā́da mandrā́ |*
> *cátasra ū́rjaṃ duduhe páyāṃsi   kvà svid asyāḥ paramáṃ jagāma ||*

devī́ṃ vā́cam ajanayanta devā́s tā́ṃ viśvárūpāḥ paśávo vadanti /

sā́ no mandréṣam ū́rjaṃ dúhānā dhenúr vā́g asmā́n úpa súṣṭutaítu //

"[To *vāc*:] speaking unintelligible words, *vāc*, the charming queen of the gods, sat down; she milked four invigorating fluids [four kinds of milk]; where did her best part go?

[11] "The gods generated divine *vāc*; animals of all forms speak her; may she, this charming cow milking vital strength for us, *vāc*, the highly praised one [praised with beautiful hymns], come [or flow] to us" (RV 8.100.10–11).

How does esoteric *vāc* "come to us"? How *vāc*, even though located in the most remote heaven, may be present here is asked in RV 1.164.34. This question is answered with the following statement: *brahmā́yáṃ vācáḥ paramáṃ vyóma*, "the *brāhmaṇa* is the supreme [or most excellent] dwelling/heaven of *vāc*" (RV 1.164.35). Furthermore, in RV 10.71.3 it is stated that "by means of *yajña* they followed the tracks of *vāc* and found she had entered in the sages." This will be restated by *vāc* herself in RV 10.125.5: "he whom I love, that one I make terribly powerful, that one I make a *brāhmaṇa*, that one a *ṛṣi*, that one a wise sage."

It appears that in the *Mahābhārata* there is not much detail about the original *vāc*, the esoteric deity, but we find much said about the power of the words uttered by *brāhmaṇas*, who by definition are supposed to be connected with *bráhman*. If the words of the *brāhmaṇas* have an effect on nature, we are facing here a case of "ritualism" (as will be defined below) — an homology between certain words and certain aspects of reality, which is referred to by such words as *satya*, *sattva*, and *tattva*. The words *satya* and *sattva* are neuter nouns derived from *sat*, the present participle of the verb √*as*, "to be" and the word *tattva* is a neuter noun derived from *tad*, the neuter form of a personal (third person singular) / demonstrative pronoun. As nouns, the words *satya*, *sattva*, and

tattva denote (any aspect of) "reality," whereas as adjectives they denote "truthfulness" as a quality of words and actions. Similarly, a "truthful word" or a "word that articulates reality as it essentially is" is the sense conveyed by the expression *ṛta vāc* in the *Mahābhārata* (see e.g. MBh 3.46.5).

MBh 3.83.84–86:

idam satyam dvijātīnām sādhūnām ātmajasya ca/
suhṛdām ca japet karṇe śiṣyasya anugatasya ca//
idam dharmyam idam puṇyam idam medhyam idam sukham/
idam svargyam idam ramyam idam pāvanam uttamam//
maharṣīṇām idam guhyam sarva pāpa pramocanam/
adhītya dvija madhye ca nirmalatvam avāpnuyāt//

[84] "This reality [or truth, of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā] one should whisper in the ear of the *brāhmaṇas*, of the virtuous people, of one's son, of one's friends, of one's student, of one's follower.

[85] "This is righteous, this is meritorious, this is vigorous, this is pleasant, this is heavenly, this is enjoyable, this is supremely purifying.

[86] "This is the secret of the great sages, liberating from all sin; having studied it in the association of the twice-born, one should obtain spotlessness" (MBh 3.83.84–86).

prāṇo vai yajñiyam sāma mano vai yajñiyam yajus/
vāg ekā vṛścate yajñam tām yajño na ativartate//

"[Yudhiṣthira:] the life air indeed is the sacrificial song; the mind indeed is the sacrificial prayer; *vāc* alone splits *yajña* [the sacrifice]; the sacrifice does not transgress *vāc*" (Mbh 3.297.35).

The above statements, Yudhiṣṭhira's enigmatic answer upon being quizzed by a Yakṣa, remind one of a *Ṛg-veda* stanza that speaks of *vāc*, the four *Vedas*, and the four priests, and which was quoted above: "One sits multiplying the wealth of the verses; one chants the [Sama] chant in the *śakvarī* meters; one, the *brahmán*, speaks the knowledge of whatever exists; one lays out the measure of the *yajña* " (RV 10.71.11).

Interestingly, in the *Mahābhārata* the river Sarasvatī goes underground because she does not want to be seen by "haters of *bráhman*," and, concomitantly, in the *Mahābhārata* the original *vāc* seems to be more hidden and implicit than before; what is spoken of overtly in the *Mahābhārata* is the words and the acts of the *brāhmaṇas*.

na cāpy evaṃ tvayā bhūyaḥ
kṣeptavyā brahma-vādinaḥ
na cāvamānyā darpāt te
vāg-viṣā bhṛśa-kopanāḥ

"[Kaśyapa to Indra:] never again can you thus insult sages learned in *bráhman*, or deride them out of pride, for when they are angered their wrath is fierce and their words burn like poison" (MBh 1.27.32).

MBh 1.38.1–3:

śṛṅgy uvāca
yady etat sāhasaṃ tāta   yadi vā duṣkṛtaṃ kṛtaṃ/
priyaṃ vāpriyaṃ vā te   vāg uktā na mṛṣā mayā//
naivānyathedaṃ bhavitā   pitar eṣa bravīmi te/
nāhaṃ mṛṣā prabravīmi   svaireṣv api kutaḥ śapan//
śamīka uvāca
jānāmy ugra-prabhāvaṃ tvāṃ   putra satya-giraṃ tathā/

nānṛtaṃ hy ukta-pūrvaṃ te naitan mithyā bhaviṣyati//

[1] "Śṛṅgī said: O Father, if I have acted rashly, or even if I have committed a wicked deed, and whether I have pleased or displeased you, nevertheless that which I have already uttered cannot be changed.

[2] O Father! I must tell you that it will come to pass, for I am incapable of false speech, even when joking, much less while uttering a curse.

[3] The sage Śamīka said: I know of your terrible prowess, my son, that your words must come to pass. You have never uttered a false word, and your tragic curse upon the king cannot fail to act" (MBh 1.38.1–3).

vāgbhir maṅgala-yuktābhis

toṣayiṣye adya mātula

"[Āstīka to Vāsuki:] I will satisfy him with words that offer real blessings" (MBh 1.49.20).

Ideology

Much has been said about the concept of ideology. Some recent analyses and attempts at better defining and applying it have been made by Woolard and by the Comaroff's. If in disguise, "ideology" may be read in Shaffer and Lichtenstein's analysis of the concepts "structure" and "habitus" (Shaffer & Lichtenstein 1995 p. 17).

One feature of ideologies is that they are implicit rather than explicit. Thus Bourdieu has defined his concept of "habitus" as producing

> practices and representations that are regular without reference to overt rules and that are goal directed without requiring conscious selection of goals or mastery of methods of achieving them (ibid).

As we have seen earlier, in Sanskrit this is referred to by the words *guha* ("hiding place, cave, heart") and *guhya* ("concealed, mysterious, secret, private, confidential") when applied to *ṛta* and *dharma*.

I see ideologies and languages as the two main elements to define a culture. By "ideology" I mean a world-view; if I had to say it in Sanskrit I would perhaps say *loka-darśana*. One may construe an ideology as an "ideal type" by connecting the contents of its three constitutive factors under one label. Thus an ideology may have either *bráhman* or *prakṛti*. as the ultimate, stated or unstated, assumption underlying all three factors or, alternatively, its foundation may be a mixture of *bráhman* and *prakṛti*. In other words, an ideology may be *vaidika*, *a-vaidika*, or something in between.

The first and perhaps the most fundamental factor to define an ideology may be called *dharma*. It defines or articulates major subject matters or major spheres of life, such as the conception of historical time and the preferred type of humans–nature relation. Regarding time, one may contrast two notions of historical time, linear vs. cyclical, and see how they manifest themselves in standard lifestyles (the third meaning of *dharma*) and how they ultimately derive from stated or unstated philosophical or religious assumptions (the first meaning of *dharma*). The humans–nature relationship may be based on planetary and cosmic homology (rituals) or on trial and error (technology) and, again, it is concomitant with standard lifestyles and ultimate assumptions.

A second factor in the makeup of an ideology is a specific system for the allocation of social prestige (*pūjā*), defining who and how is entitled to the highest position. A third factor is a system to control the sources of information (*śabda*), which defines who is considered to be a social authority, who is given credibility in a particular society. *Śabda* may naturally tend to be found wherever *pūjā* is — i.e. the distinction is

analytical.

Ideological continuity and change may be mapped out in terms of communities or geographic locations (*deśa*), historical time (*kāla*), and social hierarchy (*varṇa*). In other words, one may find tensions, adjustments, movements, etc. in between locations, time periods, or social statuses.

Merely to illustrate the application of the concept of "ideology" to a study of "culture" I may say that according to an "ideal typical" definition *mlecchas* are expected to differ from *āryas* in terms of language (they don't speak Sanskrit) and in terms of ideology (theirs seems to be more based on *prakṛti*, i.e. to be *a-vaidika*, and to be concomitant with the use of technology as opposed to rituals). This situation will be reflected in: [1] geographical segregation or at least differentiated communities within the same geographical area, i.e. a difference in *deśa*; [2] a different system of social hierarchy or different position within the same society, i.e. a difference in *varṇa*. Furthermore, the differences between the world of the *Ṛg Veda* and that of the *Mahābhārata* represent the effects of historical time (*kāla*) on language and ideology.

Yet both in the *Ṛg-veda* and in the *Mahābhārata* one finds passages that suggest a state of "mixture" of the above-mentioned "pure" or ideal-typical factors. Thus RV 10.101 describes how technology can be placed at the service of ritual. And we hear in the *Mahābhārata* that at that time craftsmanship was based on *mantras* and ritual *pūjā*, i.e. it was sonic technology, perhaps a transitional stage between "ritual" and "technology."

The language — RV and MBh

The two texts I am studying here, the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata*, are basically composed in the same language, namely Sanskrit. Yet there are several

linguistic differences between them. It might be said that we are dealing here with two parallel dialects, as the language of the *Mahābhārata* is not a linear descendant of Vedic Sanskrit. The following are some of those differences.

Some of the phonological distinctions: in intervocalic position, the sound [*ḷ*] in the *Ṛg-veda* corresponds to [*ḍ*] in later language (they are allophones); also RV has [*r*] where the later language has both [*l*] and [*r*]; the accusative plural forms in Vedic show sometimes [*r*] after [*ā*], [*ī*], [*ū*] whereas the later language has only [*ān*], [*īn*], [*ūn*].

Accent is a quite significant feature in Vedic, but has a different role in the later language. Thus *bráhman* , a neuter, action noun and *brahmán* , a masculine, agent noun are semantically different, although derived from the same root (and in this sense semantically related). Similarly, the position of the accent in a compound determines whether it is a *bahu-vrīhi* or a *tat-puruṣa*, a feature that accounts for semantic differences.

Some of the morphological differences: the dual number in nominal declension is restricted in Vedic to natural pairs or to two gods invoked together, whereas in the later language it is used whenever two items are being spoken of. There are alternative declensional forms found only in Vedic an not in the later language, or found only in the later language. Vedic has an alternative form for the dative and locative of the personal pronouns, thus we will encounter the form *asmé* (RV 10.17.8) instead of *asmabhyam* or *asmāsu.* Vedic has a subjunctive mode that disappears in the later language (e.g. the subjunctive aorist in RV 7.95.4: *śravat*). Vedic may drop the augment [*a*] in the formation of the aorist and the imperfect tenses, whereas this augment is compulsory in the later language. There is a semantic change in the perfect tense from Vedic to the later language. Vedic has more forms for gerundives and infinitives than the later language. In the *Mahābhārata* the passive verbal forms may take an active ending.

Some differences in vocabulary: the Ṛg-vedic word *ṛta* is gradually replaced in the *Mahābhārata* by *dharma* or, if retained, it undergoes a semantic change; the words *prakṛti* and *mleccha* are absent from the *Ṛg-veda*; the words *dāsa* and *dasyu* undergo a semantic change from Vedic to the later language; etc.

It would be interesting, in a thorough linguistic comparison between the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata*, to explore the possible connection between the greater number of verbal forms in the *Ṛg-veda* and the verbal root √*ṛ* (the source of *ṛta*), as opposed to a smaller stock of verbal forms in the *Mahābhārata* coupled with the verbal root √*dhṛ* (the source of *dharma*). In other words, we find in the *Ṛg-veda* a larger stock of verbal forms as well as a noun derived from the verbal root √*ṛ* ("to go" etc.) to denote the basic ideological principle, whereas in the *Mahābhārata* the verbal forms utilized are more limited, the number of compound nouns is larger, and the basic ideological principle is spoken of by a noun derived from the root √*dhṛ* ("to maintain" etc.). If a more "verbal" or "active" language is found in the *Ṛg-veda* it may turn fruitful to further explore the possible connections between this kind of language and the practice of ritual as the main type of humans-nature relationship in Ṛg-vedic times (without implying anything about the psyche of the people using one or the other dialect).

From the above remarks on some of the key terms I have used throughout it becomes apparent that my present work is in no way sufficient to arrive at precise conclusions. It is hoped, though, that it may be a modest first step in the right direction as it may turn out to be a useful collection of materials brought together for further analysis.

CHAPTER 4:
SARASVATĪ IN THE ṚG-VEDA

Of the ten Ṛg-vedic Maṇḍalas, only the Fourth does not carry the word *sarasvatī*. There are over 50 occurrences of the word *sarasvatī*, variously inflected, throughout the *Ṛg-veda*; it appears in 46 hymns, more than once in a few of them. Furthermore, three hymns in the *Ṛg-veda* are specifically dedicated to Sarasvatī: 6.61, 7.95, 7.96. I shall first review them in full and add to them a section of another hymn (RV 10.17.7–10), which is likewise dedicated to Sarasvatī and to the motherly waters as well. Then I shall break up, if analytically only, the rest of this chapter into three sections: Sarasvatī as a river, Sarasvatī as an Āprī deity, Sarasvatī as *vāc* — i.e. Sarasvatī as an earthly, riverine deity, Sarasvatī as an atmospheric or sky deity, related to *yajña*, and Sarasvatī as an esoteric deity located both on the highest plane (*parama vyoman*) and within her confidential devotees' mind (*guha*). Although Sarasvatī exists on three different levels of reality — she has a triple personality — from the texts I am examining, which seem to be directed mostly at insiders and to consider much as understood, it is not an easy task to compartmentalize Sarasvatī's multi-faceted self.

RV 6.61.1–14:

iyám adadād rabhasám ṛṇacyútaṃ dívodāsaṃ vadhryaśvā́ya dāśúṣe /
yā́ śáśvantam ācakhā́dāvasám paṇíṃ tā́ te dātrā́ṇi taviṣā́ sarasvati //
iyā́ṃ śúṣmebhir bisakhā́ ivārujat sā́nu girī́ṇā́ṃ taviṣébhir ūrmíbhiḥ /
pārāvataghnī́m ávase suvṛktíbhiḥ sárasvatīm ā́ vivāsema dhītíbhiḥ //
sárasvati devanído ní barhaya prajā́ṃ víśvasya bŕsayasya māyínaḥ /
utá kṣitíbhyo 'vánīr avindo viṣám ebhyo asravo vājinīvati //

prá ṇo devī́ sárasvatī vā́jebhir vājínīvatī /

dhīnā́m avitry àvatu //

yás tvā devi sarasvaty upabrūté dháne hité /

índraṃ ná vṛtratū́rye //

tváṃ devi sarasvaty ávā vā́jeṣu vājini /

rádā pūṣéva naḥ saním //

utá syā́ naḥ sárasvatī ghorā́ híraṇyavartaniḥ /

vṛtraghnī́ vaṣṭi suṣṭutím //

yásyā anantó áhrutas tveṣáś cariṣṇúr arṇaváḥ /

ámaś cárati róruvat //

sā́ no víśvā áti dvíṣaḥ svásṝr anyā́ ṛtā́varī /

átann áheva sū́ryaḥ //

utá naḥ priyā́ priyā́su saptásvasā sújuṣṭā /

sárasvatī stómyā bhūt //

āpaprúṣī pā́rthivāny urú rájo antárikṣam /

sárasvatī nidás pātu //

triṣadhásthā saptádhātuḥ páñca jātā́ vardháyantī /

vā́je-vāje hávyā bhūt //

prá yā́ mahimnā́ mahínāsu cékite dyumnébhir anyā́ apásām apástamā /

rátha iva bṛhatī́ vibhváne kṛtā́ upastútyā cikitúṣā sárasvatī //

sárasvaty abhí no neṣi vásyo mā́pa spharīḥ páyasā mā́ na ā́ dhak /

juṣásva naḥ sakhyā́ veśyā̀ ca mā́ tvát kṣétrāṇy áraṇāni ganma //

"[From Bhāradvāja:] she gave the impetuous Divodāsa, always inciting to the fulfillment of obligations, to Vadhryaśva who always offers worship; she again and again dug away the residence of the *paṇi*; these are your shares [or tasks] and

powers, O Sarasvatī.

[2] "She, like one who digs up fibers of lotus roots with the rushing of her waters, has shattered the peaks of mountains [or the hilltops] with her powerful waves; for protection, let us dwell in Sarasvatī; let me put to rest her, who strikes what is far [heaven] and what is near [earth], with excellent hymns of praise and prayers.

[3] "O Sarasvatī, strike down the god-scoffers, the cunning descendants of every Bṛsaya; also, for the [five] peoples you are protecting the riverine land; for them [the god-scoffers] you gushed forth poison, O you rich in horses [impetuous].

[4] "Divine Sarasvatī, the rich-in-horses [impetuous] one, [may come] forth with treasures for us; you the promoter of prayers, animate [us].

[5] "Someone invokes you, divine Sarasvatī, once the prize has been fixed; like Indra in the Vṛtra fight.

[6] "You, divine Sarasvatī, [bestow upon us] favors in the battles, you heroic one; like Pūṣan, granting us a reward.

[7] "Also, this terrific Sarasvatī, this golden wheel [or river course] to us [may come]; the [female] killer of Vṛtra is exceedingly eager.

[8] "Hers [is an] endless, non-fluctuating [or not crooked], impetuous, mobile flood; [this] power moves with a loud roaring.

[9] "[May] she, rich in *ṛta*, [send] to us all her other sisters [who are] beyond the enemies, like Sūrya [sends] the day.

[10] "Also, dear to us among all the dear ones, the one out of seven sisters, she is well liked [or welcome]; Sarasvatī is worthy of a hymn of praise.

[11] "The one who satiates all the regions of the earth, you [move in] the widest space, the region of dust [earth], and the intermediate [atmospheric] space; Sarasvatī, protect [us] from contempt.

[12] "She who has a triple seat, [being] sevenfold, she is the promoter of the five peoples [i.e. she makes them prosper]; in every battle she is to be invoked.

[13] "She, with majesty in the midst of all powers, may become manifest with all the splendors, she is special, the most skillful [or rapid] of the skilled ones; large as a chariot, built by Vibhvan [a heavenly artificer who carved her river bed], good to be praised, Sarasvatī is experienced [or attentive].

[14] "O Sarasvatī, bring near us larger wealth, do not kick us away [as a cow during milking], do not consume us with milk [or water]; be pleased with our friendship and with our living in an adjacent and dependent territory, do not let us go away from you into foreign lands" (RV 6.61.1–14).

On the above hymn Geldner comments that although it is dedicated to the poet's home river (see last stanza), "the view of Sarasvatī as the goddess of eloquence rings everywhere throughout this song" (Geldner 1951 vol. 34 p. 162).

RV 7.95.1–6:

prá kṣódasā dhā́yasā sasra eṣā́   sárasvatī dharúṇam ā́yasī pū́ḥ /
prabā́badhānā rathyèva yāti   víśvā apó mahinā́ síndhur anyā́ḥ //
ékācetat sárasvatī nadī́nāṃ   śúcir yatī́ giríbhya ā́ samudrā́t /
rāyáś cétantī bhúvanasya bhū́rer   ghṛtám páyo duduhe nā́huṣāya //
sá vāvṛdhe náryo yóṣaṇāsu   vṛ́ṣā śíśur vṛṣabhó yajñíyāsu /
sá vājínam maghávadbhyo dadhāti   ví sātáye tanvàm māmṛjīta //
utá syā́ naḥ sárasvatī juṣāṇā́   upa śravat subhágā yajñé asmín /
mitájñubhir namasyaìr iyānā́   rāyā́ yujā́ cid úttarā sákhibhyaḥ //
imā́ júhvānā yuṣmád ā́ námobhiḥ   práti stómaṃ sarasvati juṣasva /
táva śárman priyátame dádhānā   úpa stheyāma śaraṇáṃ ná vṛkṣám //

ayám u te sarasvati vásiṣṭho dvā́rāv ṛtásya subhage vy ā̊vaḥ |

várdha śubhre stuvaté rāsi vā́jān yūyám pāta svastíbhiḥ sádā naḥ ||

"[From Vasiṣṭha:] rushing [or stamping] and sucking she comes forth, Sarasvatī is the firm ground, a fortress of metal; she who is pressing forward [or hastening on] proceeds as if a chariot fighter towards all the waters, towards the other rivers, mightily.

[2] "Of all rivers, Sarasvatī has fixed her mind upon the One [or she is known as the One in a female form], she the pure one is going from the mountains all way to the ocean; becoming perceptible as the riches of the mighty [or variegated] world, she has milked ghee and milk [or water] for her neighbor [or kinsman].

[3] "He [Sarasvat], a strong hero, has thrived in the midst of young women, a young bull in the midst of those who are worthy of *yajña*; he appointed a horse for the promoters of *yajña*, he cleansed [their] body for success.

[4] "Also may she, Sarasvatī, hear us with delight at our *yajña*, she the prosperous [or charming] one; approached repeatedly by being offered homages on strong knees, equipped with wealth, she the excellent one is mindful of her friends.

[5] "Offering these oblations all the way to you [respectful plural] with homages, take delight, Sarasvatī, in this praise [or this hymn]; granting [us] your refuge, O most dear one, as if a shelter tree, may we stand near [you].

[6] "And this Vasiṣtha for you, O prosperous [or charming] Sarasvatī, has uncovered the two doors of *ṛta*; increase [or gladden], O beautiful [or radiant] one, to whom is praising [you] give all the energies [or the booties], may you [respectful plural] protect us always with blessings" (RV 7.95.1–6).

RV 7.96.1–6:

bṛhád u gāyiṣe váco asuryā̀ nadī́nām |

sárasvatīm ín mahayā suvṛktíbhi stómair vasiṣṭha ródasī ||

ubhé yát te mahinā́ śubhre ándhasī adhikṣiyánti pūrávaḥ |

sā́ no bodhy avitrī́ marútsakhā códa rā́dho maghónām ||

bhadrám íd bhadrā́ kṛṇavat sárasvaty ákavārī cetati vājínīvatī |

gṛṇānā́ jamadagnivát stuvānā́ ca vasiṣṭhavát ||

janīyánto nv ágravaḥ putrīyántaḥ sudā́navaḥ |

sárasvantaṃ havāmahe ||

yé te sarasva ūrmáyo mádhumanto ghṛtaścútaḥ |

tébhir no avitā́ bhava ||

pīpivā́ṃsaṃ sárasvata stánaṃ yó viśvádarśataḥ |

bhakṣīmáhi prajā́m íṣam ||

"[From Vasiṣṭha:] I wish [and endeavor] to chant a great word, [she is] the incorporeal [or divine] among all rivers; gladden [or invigorate] Sarasvatī, [who is in] heaven and earth, with much power, with excellent hymns of praise, with chants, O Vasiṣṭha.

[2] "O beautiful [or radiant] one, by your power the Pūrus are settled [near] both juices [Soma and milk]; she the protector attend to us, she the friend of the Maruts incite the kindness of the munificent ones.

[3] "May the gracious one [female] indeed effect prosperity, O Sarasvatī, the unselfish one [female] is attentive, the one [female] rich in horses [impetuous]; she has been praised by the likes of Jamadagni, now may she be celebrated in hymns by the likes of Vasiṣṭha.

[4] "Indeed, the unmarried ones wish for wives, the munificent ones yearn for

children; let us offer oblations to Sarasvat [male].

[5] "Those waves of yours, O Sarasvat, are rich in honey and distilling ghee; with them be our protector.

[6] "The swelling breast of Sarasvat is visible to all; we should eat, seeking progeny" (RV 7.96.1–6).

RV 10.17.7–10:

sárasvatīṃ devayánto havante sárasvatīm adhvaré tāyámāne /
sárasvatīṃ sukṛ́to ahvayanta sárasvatī dāśúṣe vā́ryaṃ dāt //
sárasvati yā́ sarátham yayā́tha svadhā́bhir devi pitṛ́bhir mádantī /
āsádyāsmín barhíṣi mādayasva anamīvā́ íṣa ā́ dhehy asmé //
sárasvatīṃ yā́m pitáro hávante dakṣiṇā́ yajñám abhinákṣamāṇāḥ /
sahasrārghám iḷó átra bhāgáṃ rāyás póṣaṃ yájamāneṣu dhehi //
ā́po asmā́n mātáraḥ śundhayantu ghṛténa no ghṛtapvàḥ punantu /
víśvaṃ hí riprám praváhanti devī́r úd íd ābhyaḥ śúcir ā́ pūtá emi //

"[From Devaśravas or Damana Yāmāyana:] those faithful to the gods have been calling out Sarasvatī, in the sacrifice Sarasvatī is being reached to; the virtuous are speaking [of] Sarasvatī, may Sarasvatī give valuables to the worshiper.

[8] "Divine Sarasvatī, [she] exhilarated, has gone on the same chariot spontaneously with the forefathers; be seated on this *kuśa* grass, be exhilarated, present to us healthy and juicy [foodstuffs].

[9] "The forefathers have been calling out her, Sarasvatī, and she the prolific cow is coming to [our] *yajña*; here a portion of sacred words [or refreshments] worth a thousand, abundance of wealth [let you] present among the worshipers.

[10] "Let the motherly waters cleanse us, let the clarifying ghees purify us with ghee; indeed these deities wash away all impurities, from them [females] I go away glowing and pure" (RV 10.17.7–10).

Sarasvatī as a river

I shall try to put together under this heading all the Ṛg-vedic citations that refer somehow to Sarasvatī as a river. Yet, as I explained at the beginning of this chapter, there ought to be some overlap as she is a river that flows on two if not on three planes (RV 6.61.12) and she is simultaneously an atmospheric deity and the supreme *vāc*. On all this, I shall let the texts speak for themselves.

tā́n pū́rvayā nivídā hūmahe vayáṃ bhágam mitrám áditiṃ dákṣam asrídham /
aryamáṇaṃ váruṇaṃ sómam aśvínā sárasvatī naḥ subhágā máyas karat //

"They we invoke with traditional statements: Bhaga, Mitra, Aditi, Dakṣa, the unfailing ones, Aryaman, Varuṇa, Soma, the Aśvins; may Sarasvatī the prosperous [or charming] make us happy" (RV 1.89.3).

yás te stánaḥ śaśayó yó mayobhū́r yéna víśvā púṣyasi vā́ryāṇi /
yó ratnadhā́ vasuvíd yáḥ sudátraḥ sárasvati tám ihá dhā́tave kaḥ //

"That ever-flowing breast of yours is causing delight [or refreshment], by it you nourish all valuables; this supporter of jewels and bestower of treasures is granting good gifts; O Sarasvatī, [place] that here [for us] to suck" (RV 1.164.49).

sárasvati tvám asmā́ṁ aviḍḍhi marútvatī dhṛṣatī́ jeṣi śátrūn /
tyáṃ cic chárdhantaṃ taviṣīyámāṇam índro hanti vṛṣabháṃ śáṇḍikānām //

"O Sarasvatī, stay by us, you bold allied with the Maruts, attack the enemies; Indra strikes the impudent leader of the Śaṇḍikas who is trying to show his strength" (RV 2.30.8).

yā́ guṅgū́r yā́ sinīvālī́ yā́ rākā́ yā́ sárasvatī /
indrāṇī́m ahva ūtáye varuṇānī́ṃ svastáye //

"Guṅgū, Sinīvālī, Rākā, Sarasvatī; Indrāṇī I have called for their favours, and Varuṇānī for healing [all feminine nouns]" (RV 2.32.8).

RV 2.41.16–18:

ámbitame nádītame dévitame sárasvati /
apraśastā́ iva smasi práśastim amba nas kṛdhi //
tvé víśvā sarasvati śritā́yūṃṣi devyā́m /
śunáhotreṣu matsva prajā́ṃ devi didiḍḍhi naḥ //
imā́ bráhma sarasvati juṣásva vājinīvati /
yā́ te mánma gṛtsamadā́ ṛtāvari priyā́ devéṣu júhvati //

[16] "O best of mothers, O best of rivers, O best of gods, Sarasvatī, [we feel] as if given no consideration, please favor us with renown, O mother.

[17] "In you, Sarasvatī, are all life powers, rejoice in the Śunahotras, allot our descendants their share, O goddess.

[18] "Rejoice in this sacred hymns, O rich in horses [impetuous] Sarasvatī, O you rich in *ṛta*, we the Gṛtsamada poets have thought of you; [it is] you the dear [that people] worship in the gods" (RV 2.41.16–18).

ní tvā dadhe vára ā́ pṛthivyā́ íḷāyās padé sudinatvé áhnām /

dṛṣádvatyām mā́nuṣa āpayā́yāṃ sárasvatyāṃ revád agne didīhi //

"I have placed you in the best place of the earth, in the dwelling of Iḷā, at the time of fine weather [or the auspicious time] of the days; by the Dṛṣadvatī, among the descendants of Manu, by the Āpayā, by the Sarasvatī; shine opulently, O Agni" (RV 3.23.4).

vidyúdrathā marúta ṛṣṭimánto divó máryā ṛtájātā ayā́saḥ /

sárasvatī śṛṇavan yajñíyāso dhā́tā rayíṃ sahávīraṃ turāsaḥ //

"[From Prajāpati Vaiśvāmitra or Prajāpati Vācya:] let the Maruts with chariots made of lightning, carrying spears, the heavenly youngsters, born from *ṛta*, tireless, and Sarasvatī, all worthy of *yajña*, hear; give us wealth along with powerful men" (RV 3.54.13).

dámūnaso apáso yé suhástā vṛ́ṣṇaḥ pátnīr nadyó vibhvataṣṭā́ḥ /

sárasvatī bṛhaddivótá rākā́ daśasyántīr varivasyantu śubhrā́ḥ //

"The friends of the house, skillful people clever with their hands [experts in performing sacrifices], the wives of mighty men, the perfectly carved rivers cut out by a skillful artificer [Vibhvan, one of the three Ṛbhus], Sarasvatī, goddess Rākā of the lofty sky, they offer service; let they the shining ones increase our prosperity" (RV 5.42.12).

ā́ no divó bṛhatáḥ párvatād ā́ sárasvatī yajatā́ gantu yajñám /

hávaṃ devī́ jujuṣāṇā́ ghṛtā́cī śagmā́ṃ no vā́cam uśatī́ śṛṇotu //

"From high heaven, from the mountain, let the worthy of worship Sarasvatī come to our *yajña*; let the goddess pleased with the oblation, filled with ghee, efficient willingly hear our word" (RV 5.43.11).

ágna índra váruṇa mítra dévāḥ śárdhaḥ prá yanta mấrutotá viṣṇo /

ubhấ nấsatyā rudró ádha gnấḥ pūṣấ bhágaḥ sárasvatī juṣanta //

"O Agni, Indra, Varuṇa, Mitra, the many gods, and the Martus and Viṣṇu favour us; may the two Nāsatyas, Rudra, the divine females, Pūṣan, Bhaga, Sarasvatī be pleased" (RV 5.46.2).

pấvīravī kanyầ citrấyuḥ sárasvatī vīrápatnī dhíyaṃ dhāt /

gnấbhir áchidraṃ śaraṇáṃ sajóṣā durādhárṣaṃ gṛṇaté śárma yaṃsat //

"May the daughter of lightning of wonderful vitality, Sarasvatī, the master of a hero, give us higher thoughts; she who is in harmony with the divine females, may she grant us unfailing shelter, a hard-to-approach refuge for the invoker" (RV 6.49.7).

té no rudráḥ sárasvatī sajóṣā mīḷhúṣmanto víṣṇur mṛḷantu vāyúḥ /

ṛbhukṣấ vấjo daívyo vidhātấ parjányāvấtā pipyatām íṣaṃ naḥ //

"May Rudra and Sarasvatī, she who is in harmony with all of them, may generous Viṣṇu and Vāyu be gracious and make us happy; may Ṛbhukṣan, Vāja, the divine Vidhātṛ [distributor], Parjanya and Vāta send us nourishment" (RV 6.50.12).

índro nédiṣṭham ávasấgamiṣṭhaḥ sárasvatī síndhubhiḥ pínvamānā /

parjányo na óṣadhībhir mayobhúr agníḥ suśáṃsaḥ suhávaḥ pitéva //

"Indra, come the nearest with refreshments, Sarasvatī swelling with [or by] the rivers; Parjanya delighting [or refreshing] with healing herbs, Agni saying good things and listening willingly, like a father" (RV 6.52.6).

ágne yāhí dūtyàm mấ riṣaṇyo devấṁ áchā brahmakṛ́tā gaṇéna /

sárasvatīm marúto aśvínāpó yákṣi devā́n ratnadhéyāya víśvān ||

"[From Vasiṣṭha Maitrāvaruṇi:] O Agni, go as a messenger, do not fail, to the gods on behalf of the assembled makers of crystal-clear sacred hymns; worship Sarasvatī, the Maruts, the Aśvins, the waters, all the gods so that they may grant jewels" (RV 7.9.5).

ā́ yát sākám̐ yaśáso vāvaśānā́ḥ sárasvatī saptáthī síndhumātā |

yā́ḥ suṣváyanta sudúghāḥ sudhārā́ abhí svéna páyasā pī́pyānāḥ ||

"[From Vasiṣṭha:] they come together honored, roaring [or eagerly], and Sarasvatī is the seventh one, whose mother is the ocean; they [feminine] are flowing yielding abundant [or good] milk, being beautiful streams, overflowing with their own water [or milk]" (RV 7.36.6).

ā́gne gíro divá ā́ pṛthivyā́ mitrám̐ vaha váruṇam índram agním |

ā́ryamáṇam áditim̐ víṣṇum eṣām̐ sárasvatī marúto mādayantām ||

"[From Vasiṣṭha:] O you related to Agni, [bring] heavenly words all the way to the earth, carrying Mitra, Varuṇa, Indra, Agni, Aryaman, Aditi, Viṣṇu; she Sarasvatī and the Maruts are exhilarating" (RV 7.39.5).

séd ugró astu marutaḥ sá śuṣmī́ yám mártyam pṛṣadaśvā ávātha |

utém agníḥ sárasvatī junánti ná tásya rāyáḥ paryetā́sti ||

"[From Vasiṣṭha:] let he be only formidable, O Maruts, let he be roaring [or vigorous], that mortal you promote, O you of the spotted horses [or you who have antelopes for horses]; also Agni and Sarasvatī join, [so that] there is nobody roaming around his wealth"(RV 7.40.3).

índro vā ghéd íyan maghám̥ sárasvatī vā subhágā dadír vásu |

tvám̥ vā citra dāśúṣe ||

cítra íd rā́jā rājakā́ íd anyaké yaké sárasvatīm ánu |

parjánya iva tatánad dhí vr̥ṣṭyā́ sahásram ayútā dádat ||

[17] "Either Indra gave this gift or Sarasvatī, the prosperous one, has given this wealth; or you, Citra, to whom is honoring you.

[18] "Citra is indeed a king, petty princes are indeed others who live along the Sarasvatī; like Parjanya with the rain, so gave he one hundred, ten thousand" (RV 8.21.17–18).

ā́hám̥ sárasvatīvator indrāgnyór ávo vr̥ṇe |

yā́bhyām̥ gāyatrám r̥cyáte ||

"I choose the favor of Indra and Agni accompanied by Sarasvatī; the two of whom this hymn in the *gāyatrī* meter is dedicated" (RV 8.38.10).

pūṣā́ víṣṇur hávanam me sárasvaty ávantu saptá síndhavaḥ |

ā́po vā́taḥ párvatāso vánaspátiḥ śr̥ṇótu pr̥thivī́ hávam ||

"Let Pūṣan, Viṣṇu, Sarasvatī, the seven rivers be pleased [with] my sacrifice; let the waters, the wind, the mountains, the forest tree, the earth hear the offering" (RV 8.54.4).

pāvamānī́r yó adhyéty ŕ̥ṣibhiḥ sámbhr̥tam̥ rásam |

tásmai sárasvatī duhe kṣīrám̥ sarpír mádhūdakám ||

"[From Vasiṣṭha:] whoever recites the Pāvamānī hymns, the essence brought together by the sages, for him Sarasvatī milks condensed milk, ghee, honey, water" (RV 9.67.32).

ā́ naḥ pūṣā́ pávamānaḥ surātáyo mitró gachantu váruṇaḥ sajóṣasaḥ |

bŕ̥haspátir marúto vāyúr aśvínā tváṣṭā savitā́ suyámā sárasvatī ||

"Let Pūṣan, Pavamāna, the Rich in Gifts, Mitra, Varuṇa come in harmony with each other; Bṛhaspati, the Maruts, Vāyu, the Aśvins, Tvaṣṭṛ, Savitṛ, Sarasvatī, all well regulated" (RV 9.81.4).

ā́po revatīḥ kṣáyathā hí vásvaḥ krátuṃ ca bhadrám bibhṛthā́mṛ́taṃ ca |

rāyáś ca sthá svapatyásya pátnīḥ sárasvatī tád gṛṇaté váyo dhāt ||

"[From a hymn to the waters:] waters, opulent residences indeed, you convey riches, determination, and prosperity, and immortality and wealth, you are the masters of good offspring; Sarasvatī may offer invigorating food to him who praises her" (RV 10.30.12).

sárasvatī saráyuḥ síndhur ūrmíbhir mahó mahī́r ávasā́ yantu vákṣaṇīḥ |

devī́r ā́po mātáraḥ sūdayitnvó ghṛtávat páyo mádhuman no arcata ||

"Let Sarasvatī, Sarayu, and the river with waves, the big and invigorating ones come with their favor; let the divine waters, the mothers who keep [people] in order, their water full of ghee and honey, sing for us" (RV 10.64.9).

RV 10.65.1, 13:

agnír índro váruṇo mitró aryamā́ vāyúḥ pūṣā́ sárasvatī sajóṣasaḥ |

ādityā́ víṣṇur marútaḥ svàr bṛhát sómo rudró áditir bráhmaṇas pátiḥ ||

pā́vīravī tanyatúr ékapād ajó divó dhartā́ síndhur ā́paḥ samudríyaḥ |

víśve devā́saḥ śṛṇavan vácāṃsi me sárasvatī sahá dhībhíḥ púraṃdhyā ||

[1] "Agni, Indra, Varuṇa, Mitra, Aryaman, Vāyu, Pūṣan, Sarasvatī, all in harmony

with each other, the Āditya, Viṣṇu, the Maruts, the High Sun, Soma, Rudra, Aditi, Brahmaṇaspati.

[13] "The daughters of lightning, the unborn one-footed, the divine maintainer [or the maintainer of heaven], the river, the ocean waters; may all the gods hear my words; Sarasvatī [is] with the higher thoughts and with Puraṃdhi" (RV 10.65.1, 13).

putrám iva pitárāv aśvínobhā índrāváthuḥ kā́vyair daṃsánābhiḥ /

yát surā́mam vy ápibaḥ śácībhiḥ sárasvatī tvā maghavann abhiṣṇak //

"Like the parents to the child so the two Aśvins are standing by Indra with poetic inspiration and marvelous skills; that very delightful [fluid] you drink, [and] helpfully Sarasvatī protected you, Indra [or the munificent]" (RV 10.131.5).

aryamáṇam bṛhaspátim índraṃ dā́nāya codaya /

vā́taṃ víṣṇuṃ sárasvatīṃ savitā́raṃ ca vājínam //

"Assist Aryaman, Bṛhaspati, Indra in the attainment of gifts; Vāta, Viṣṇu, Sarasvatī, and impetuous Savitṛ" (RV 10.141.5).

gárbhaṃ dhehi sinīvāli gárbhaṃ dhehi sarasvati /

gárbhaṃ te aśvínau devā́v ā́ dhattām púṣkarasrajā //

"Take into the womb [conceive], O Sinīvalī, take into the womb, Sarasvatī; to take into your womb [may] the two divine Aśvins, garlanded with lotuses, [help]" (RV 10.184.2).

Various rivers

It seems interesting, at this point, to take a quick look at some of the statements about rivers in general in the *Ṛg-veda* as Sarasvatī is, after all, one of them. We can begin by reviewing the one hymn that is specifically dedicated to the rivers. We will find here that the rivers are mentioned in a geographical sequence, from east to west, a peculiarity that has led some authors to conclude that the poet himself was located where the river list begins — by the Gaṅgā. Whether the poet personally visited the Gaṅgā or heard about it from others, his name gives us a hint: he may have been born as an "inhabitant of Sindhu," *sindhukṣit.*

RV 10.75.1–9:

prá sú va āpo mahimā́nam uttamáṃ kārúr vocāti sádane vivásvataḥ I
prá saptá-sapta tredhā́ hí cakramúḥ prá sṛ́tvarīṇām áti síndhur ójasā II
prá te aradad váruṇo yā́tave patháḥ síndho yád vā́jāṁ abhy ádravas tvám I
bhū́myā ádhi pravátā yāsi sā́nunā yád eṣām ágraṃ jágatām irajyási II
diví svanó yatate bhū́myopáry anantáṃ śúṣmam úd iyarti bhānúnā I
abhrā́d iva prá stanayanti vṛṣṭáyaḥ síndhur yád éti vṛṣabhó ná róruvat II
abhí tvā sindho śíśum ín ná mātáro vāśrā́ arṣanti páyaseva dhenávaḥ I
rā́jeva yúdhvā nayasi tvám ít sícau yád āsām ágram pravátām ínakṣasi II
imám me gaṅge yamune sarasvati śútudri stómaṃ sacatā páruṣṇy ā́ I
asiknyā́ marudvṛdhe vitástayā ā́rjīkīye śṛṇuhy ā́ suṣómayā II
tṛṣṭā́mayā prathamáṃ yā́tave sajū́ḥ susártvā rasáyā śvetyā́ tyā́ I
tváṃ sindho kúbhayā gomatī́ṃ krúmum mehatnvā́ sarátham yā́bhir ī́yase II
ṛ́jīty énī rúśatī mahitvā́ pári jráyāṃsi bharate rájāṃsi//
ádabdhā sindhur apásām apástamā áśvā ná citrā́ vápuṣīva darśatā́ II

sváśvā síndhuḥ suráthā suvā́sā hiraṇyáyī súkṛtā vājínīvatī /

ū́rṇāvatī yuvatíḥ sīlámāvaty utā́dhi vaste subhágā madhuvṛ́dham //

sukhám ráthaṃ yuyuje síndhur aśvínaṃ téna vā́jaṃ saniṣad asmínn ājaú /

mahā́n hy àsya mahimā́ panasyáté adabdhasya sváyaśaso virapśínaḥ //

"[To the rivers from Sindukṣit Praiyamedha:] your supreme greatness, O waters, will the poet now celebrate at the place of Vivasvat; threefold they advance in [sets of] seven, the power of the main river surpasses that of all the tributaries.

[2] "O *sindhu* [a generic word for "river"], Varuṇa cuts the channels for your flow as you are running towards the booty; you speed over the slopes of the land, you rule over this [land] and all the worlds.

[3] "The roar goes forth into heaven above the earth, she [the river] with shining waves animates her endless speed; as rains issue thunder from the clouds, *sindhu* advances bellowing like a bull.

[4] "They run toward you, *sindhu*, like mothers toward their children, like cows with their milk; you lead your two flanks as if a king going to battle, trying to win the elevations.

[5] "Take this hymn from me, O Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, Śutudrī [Śatadru, Sutlej], Paruṣṇī [Irāvatī, Ravi], with the Asiknī (Chandrabhāgā, Chenab), O Marudvṛdhā, with the Vitastā [Jehlum], Ārjīkīyā with the Suṣomā [Sohan]; please hear.

[6] "For flowing, first she unites with the Tṛṣṭāmā, with the Susartu, the Rasā, with this Śvetyā; you, O *sindhu*, with the Kubhā [Kabul] to the Gomatī [Gumal], to the Krumu [Kuram] with the Mahatnu, you go in the same chariot with them,

[7] "Straight-flowing, white-colored, bright-shining she moves along with her ample volumes carrying the sphere of the clouds [or the different levels of sky]; the

inviolable *sindhu* is the most efficacious of the efficacious, is speckled like a mare, is like a woman to look at.

[8] "This impetuous *sindhu* [river] is rich in excellent horses, good chariots, beautiful garments, abundant gold, good deeds; she the young woman is rich in wool, rich in plants for making ropes; also she puts on lovely clothes, the fortunate one abounding in sweetness [or who increases honey].

[9] "The easy-going horse chariot the Sindhu had harnessed, with which she may bring here booty sitting [by the sacrificial altar]; whose great might is to be praised, that of the unbroken, glorious on her own, exuberant" (RV 10.75.1–9).

The rivers are repeatedly alluded to as a set of seven. "They come together honored, roaring [or eagerly], and Sarasvatī is the seventh one, whose mother is the ocean; they [the rivers] are flowing yielding abundant [or good] milk, being beautiful streams, overflowing with their own water [or milk]" (RV 7.36.6); "threefold they advance in [sets of] seven" (RV 10.75.1).

"Let Pūṣan, Viṣṇu, Sarasvatī, the seven rivers be pleased [with] my sacrifice; let the waters, the wind, the mountains, the forest tree, the earth hear the offering" (RV 8.54.4). Incidentally, in RV 8.41.2 Varuṇa is described along with the rivers, seven sisters.

yá ṛ́kṣād áṃhaso mucád yó vā́ryāt saptá síndhuṣu /
vádhar dāsásya tuvinṛmṇa nīnamaḥ //

"He [Indra] is the one who got rid of trouble from the pernicious and from [for?] the *ārya* in [the area of] the seven rivers [he who got rid of] the deadly weapon of the *dāsa*; very valiant, the carrier of the thunderbolt [or one who commands respect]"

(RV 8.24.27).

According to some authors, the Sapta Sindhu or Sapta-sindhavaḥ (the land of the seven rivers) is the area of the Five Rivers — i.e. the Panjab: Śatadru, Vipāśā, Irāvatī, Candrabhāgā, Vitastā — plus the Sarasvatī and the Sindhu, whereas others count the Five Rivers plus the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā. The *Ṛg-veda* speaks only about a region of seven rivers; a term for the area of the five rivers (*pañcanada*) is first found in the *Mahābhārata*.

"Also, dear to us among all the dear ones, the one out of seven sisters, she is well liked [or welcome]; Sarasvatī is worthy of a hymn of praise" (RV 6.61.10). I understand the *bahu-vrīhi* compound *saptásvasā* to mean that Sarasvatī has a group (of rivers) made up by seven members, one of which is herself. Otherwise, if *saptásvasā* were to be translated as "she who has seven sisters" there would be no difference here between a *bahu-vrīhi* and a *tat-puruṣa* compound. In a *tat-puruṣa* the first member of the compound is in the genitive case in most instances, and this would yield the hypothetical (and wrong) translation I just gave. On the other hand, the understanding of the *bahu-vrīhi* compound the way I have suggested above — "the one out of seven sisters" — squares with numerous statements throughout the *Ṛg-veda* about a set of seven rivers. The first line in RV 8.54.4 — "Pūṣan, Viṣṇu, Sarasvatī, the seven rivers" — which obviously differentiates between the seven rivers (seven sisters) and Sarasvatī, is best understood if "Sarasvatī" is seen as referring to as an atmospheric deity or as *vāc*, while she as a river is included in "the seven rivers."

In RV 1.34.8 and 8.96.1 the seven rivers are called "seven mothers." RV 5.43.1 calls seven big or strong cows to come over with their milk; in a sense, these are the seven rivers. And in fact RV 1.32.2 compares the rivers' flowing toward the ocean with cows going to their calves. RV 10.104.8 speaks about seven divine rivers with which the

ocean (*sindhu*) is being filled by Indra, plus ninety nine other rivers, perhaps meant for the humans.

In RV 3.33.2 two rivers, the Vipāśā and the Śatadru according to Geldner, are said to run towards the ocean like two cart-driving horses. RV 7.49.2 says that the waters flowing towards the ocean are divine. And RV 8.6.35 remarks that the rivers make the ocean big.

In RV 1.80.8 and 1.121.13 we hear about ninety navigable rivers (*navatiṃ nāvyā*). In RV 8.98.8 the word *yavya* is used to refer to rivers; this might be taken as denoting irrigation canals, as *yavya* is a derivative noun from *yava* "barley" (according to Monier-Williams, "suitable for barley"). In RV 1.167.4 *yavyas* are said to be "agile" or "dexterous" and in RV 1.173.12 they are said to be "liberal" or "bountiful." RV 3.45.3 uses the word *kulyā* to denote irrigation canals.

For us English speakers what is "natural" is what is "out there" as opposed to what is "artificial," what has been made up by someone. Yet we find in the *Ṛg-veda* that even what is "natural" has been made up by someone. "The perfectly carved rivers cut out by a skillful artificer [Vibhvan, one of the three Ṛbhus]" (RV 5.42.12).

Sarasvatī stands out

The theme of this whole work is Sarasvatī's uniqueness. In this section I am merely gathering a few passages from the previous Ṛg-vedic survey to illustrate this point. RV 7.95.2: "Of all rivers, Sarasvatī has fixed her mind upon the One [or she is known as the One in a female form], she the pure one is going from the mountains all way to the ocean." Which ocean? In RV 10.136.5 two oceans are mentioned: *pūrva-samudra* (east) and *apara-samudra* (west). Sarasvatī runs towards the western one, the

Indian Ocean.

"O best of mothers, O best of rivers, O best of gods, Sarasvatī, [we feel] as if given no consideration, please favor us with renown, O mother" (RV 2.41.16).

"She, with majesty in the midst of all powers, may become manifest with all the splendor, she is different, the most skillful [or rapid] of the skilled ones; large as a chariot, built by Vibhvan [a heavenly artificer who carved her river bed], good to be praised, Sarasvatī is experienced" (RV 6.61.13).

Sarasvatī as a terrestrial river, one among seven, comes from the atmospheric *samudra* and ultimately from *ṛtasya yoni.* I am taking he compound *sindhu-mātā* in RV 7.36.6 as a *bahu-vrīhi* because the accent falls on its first member, a feature that distinguishes *bahu-vrīhis* from *tat-puruṣas* (a *tat-puruṣa* reading would be "the mother of the ocean"). For this reason — *rodasī*, i.e. the interplay of different levels — Sarasvatī as a terrestrial river is called *asuryā nadī́nām* "the incorporeal [or divine, superhuman] among rivers" (RV 7.96.1).

Yet Sarasvatī is not merely an earthly river; she is likewise a river on two higher levels. This is expressed, for example in the following stanzas: "she who has a triple seat, [being] sevenfold" (RV 6.61.12); "threefold they [the rivers] advance in [sets of] seven, the power of the main river surpasses that of all the tributaries" (RV 10.75.1). In other words, as one in a group of seven rivers, she runs on this earth as well as on two higher dimensions. Quoting from the *Atharva-veda* Witzel says that there are three Sarasvatī's (Witzel 1984 p. 218).

"And this Vasiṣṭha for you, O prosperous [or charming] Sarasvatī, has uncovered the two doors of *ṛta*" (RV 7.95.6). One point in need of further clarification is

the existence of two branches of Sarasvatī; and Sarasvatī as a twin sister of Yamunā (Witzel 1984 pp. 224 & 255); and the place of Dṛṣadvatī, a tributary to Sarasvatī, which may be one branch of Yamunā. We will hear below about the two branches of Sarasvatī as an atmospheric deity, the Milky Way, yet the geographical location of the earthly Sarasvatī's two branches in her successive ages or stages remains uncertain. Traditonal lore has it, and Witzel cites it, that at Prayāga "the Yamunā, the Gaṅgā, and the [eastern branch of the] heavenly river [the Sarasvatī] converge invisibly" (Witzel 1984 p. 224).

Three levels of reality

Speaking about "a hierarchy of dimensional levels within the universe" Richard Thompson states that, "The Vedic *śāstras* mention many remarkable events that are said to have taken place on the earth in the remote past. Many of these events involve phenomena that we do not experience today, and one might ask why this should be so" (Thompson 1989 pp. 42–43). What follows is used by Thompson to illustrate his point of a "higher dimensional travel along the 'vertical dimension' of the universe":

> This water [of the Ganges River] takes a thousand *yugas* to reach the planet Dhruvaloka, or the polestar, which is situated approximately 30 million miles above the sun. (Here the term *yuga* indicates a *divya-yuga* of 4,320,000 years.) Since the sun is situated vertically in the center of the universe, this means that the Ganges covers a distance of some two billion miles in 4,320,000,000 years. Since this is a very slow rate of progress even for a very sluggish river, this may be another example of the transformation of time, and possibly of space, which occurs in the higher dimensions of the universe...
>
> The celestial Ganges is identified with the Milky Way... It is interesting to note that similar ideas have traditionally been held in cultures around the world. Thus, both the Polynesians and various American Indian tribes maintained that the Milky Way is a pathway to heaven followed by the souls of the departed...
>
> The ancient Egyptians apparently regarded the Nile as an earthly continuation of

> the Milky Way...
> The Chinese also had the idea that the Milky Way is a celestial river that descends to the earth. Their account is as follows: 'The celestial river divides into two branches near the North Pole and goes from there to the South Pole... The river is the celestial water, flowing across the heavens and falling under the earth'" (Thompson 1989 pp. 94–95).

When discussing the relation between a celestial river — the Sarasvatī this time — and the Milky Way, Witzel cites an essay written in 1894 in which the author critiques the interpretation of the *Vedas* as a "mythologie de la nature" to suggest that, "Le *Ṛg Veda* ne connaīt pas de phénomènes naturels devenus dieux, il ne connaīt que des hommes" (Witzel 1984 p. 213). Without desiring to fall back into "mythologie de la nature" Witzel wants to study the "ciel nocturne" in the *Vedas.*

The sky is the domain of the gods and is also the place that some of the humans hope to relocate to in their next life. Witzel cites verses stating that the Milky Way moves toward the east or both the east and the north (op. cit. p. 215) and adds that for the Milky Way to be able to ascend in the sky between the winter and the summer solstices it needs the help of rituals performed by humans.

Now the point is that the word *svarga* only appears once in the *Ṛg Veda* according to Witzel and Monier-Williams. What is the name for the Milky Way in the *Ṛg Veda* then? "Je pense que le nom ṛgvédique de la Voie Lactée est Sarasvatī" says Witzel (op. cit. p. 217). "Elle est une rivière terrestre, une déesse que gouverne la fécondité des femmes, mais aussi elle reçoit des descriptions bien moins banales. Elle descend des montagnes (de l'Himālaya) mais également du 'haut ciel'."

Witzel observes that the source of the Sarasvatī is considered in the Vedic texts to be the center of the planet and the place where the earth is connected with the

heavens. He suggests similar beliefs regarding the Amu Darya (Oxus), the Volga, and the Dniepr (Witzel 1984 p. 234).

In fact Lüders has gathered some data about rivers that are not Sanskrit-related, such as the Nile and old Greek rivers, which are said to have come down from heaven — and Lüders uses the word *avatāra* in this regard (Lüders 1951 pp. 140–143; cf. MBh 3.88.3 about Plakṣa Prasravaṇa).

On the number two.

We find in many places a dichotomic classification of realms. Two regions — avara, arvāvat (on this side, proximate) vs. para, parāvat (on the other side, distant): RV 7.6.7 (earth and heaven); 8.12.17 (*parāvat samudra* only; it may mean *soma*); 8.13.15 (far, near, or by the ocean); 8.82.1 (far and near); 8.97.4 (far and near); 9.65.22 (far and near and by a lake in Kurukṣetra); 10.137.2 (*parāvata sindhu*); 10.187.2 (far, across the atmosphere or the ocean).

In RV 3.54.6, 8 two sisters hold the two worlds from *ṛtasya yoni* "the womb or source of *ṛta*": "The poet, he who oversees mankind, has seen , where two beings [neuter; *ṛta* is also a neuter noun] are rejoicing in abundant ghee. The two of them have made their residence differently, just like the bird has, while sharing a common understanding by having the same purpose. The two of them hold all beings and, while bearing the big gods, they don't falter, [because] the One reigns over everything that moves, that is fixed, that is acting, that is feathered, that is manifold from birth" (RV 3.54.6, 8).

RV 2.1.15 is one of the many references to *rodasī* —*dyā́vāpṛthivī́ ródasī ubhé*, "*rodasī* are both heaven and earth" Then in RV 10.125.6 Sarasvatī herself describes her position: "I pervade both heaven and earth."

On the number three.

On the other hand, in RV 5.60.6 three levels of reality are spoken of and called *uttama* (the highest), *madhyama* (the middle), and *avama* (the lowest). In RV 6.61.11 the three levels are *urú rájo antárikṣam* — "the widest space, the region of dust [earth], and the intermediate [atmospheric] space."

From RV 6.61.12 ("she who has a triple seat") we gather that Sarasvatī lives in three realms — the highest (as *vāc*), the sky (as an Āprī deity or the Milky Way), and the earth (as river). Moreover, there are three *samudras*: heart / esoteric, sky /atmosphere, and terrestrial. The relations between higher and lower realms seem to be based on *ṛta* and *yajña*. The expression *antaḥ samudra*, which refers to the "heart / esoteric" level (*guha*), is found in several places: RV 1.159.4; 4.58.1, 5, 11; 10.5.1; 10.177.1. And this is Sarasvatī's definition of her source: "my womb is in the water, in the internal ocean" (RV 10.125.7).

On the number four.

According to Monier-Williams the word *samudra* denotes not only regular oceans on the earth, but also aerial waters, the atmospheric ocean or sky. Thus there are four principal oceans, one for each quarter of the sky and four oceans are mentioned in RV 1.164.42 and 9.33.6.

Monier-Williams says, furthermore, that the word *sindhu* refers to the waters, even in the sky, and is a symbolical term for the number 4 as well. The word *sindhu* denoting heavenly waters is found in: RV 1.52.14, 1.112.9, 1.146.4, 1.164.25, 2.11.9, 2.28.4, 5.53.7, 7.87.6, 10.123.4.

In RV 1.164.42 *vāc* is said to be the origin of the four oceans / directions. And the earth has four corners (RV 10.58.3). In RV 8.65.1–2 there are four directions and three regions — the heavenly water spring, space, and the ocean — which may be just three names for heaven (atmospheric *samudra*).

A note on *pur*

The word *pur* is a place one lives in, be it [1] a geographical location, a city on earth, or [2] a super-human, atmospheric site (of the *asuras*) or [3] the human body or a mysterious place in the highest plane (whose dweller is the *puruṣa*). In other words, once again we are met with three levels of meaning. Erdosy's paper on *pur* dwells on the atmospheric level (Erdosy n.d.), which is also alluded to in RV 4.23.9 as well as RV 6.61.11 and RV 10.190.3 (*antarikṣa*). The geographical level is found in RV 4.30.20: *śatam aśman-mayīnām purām… divodāsāya*, "of one hundred cities made of stone… for the benefit of Divodāsa." Both the human and the mysterious highest level are denoted by the words *antaḥ samudra* (RV 1.159.4, 10.125.7), and *guha*, which we encountered earlier when discussing *ṛta* and *vāc* (RV 1.67.7, 8.6.8, etc.).

In RV 7.95.1 Sarasvatī is called *pur* (and *pur* is a feminine noun) because she protects the *āryas* by delimiting a safe space for them. The word *pur* may partially denote something close to *kṣetra* — a clearly delimited place where one can live peacefully — but with the added element of protection from whoever or whatever is seen as threatening. Both a *pur* and a *kṣetra* have "boundaries" and also "doors" (physical or otherwise) so that those inside may communicate with the external world.

Some of the *puras* described in the *Ṛg -veda* are said to be related to autumn (*śarad*, a feminine noun), yet *śāradā* — a word that means "a female connected with autumn" — is another name of Sarasvatī as *vāc*. Thus *vāc*/ Sarasvatī is described here

as shelter, while the river is implicitly understood as her alter ego. Furthermore, Erdosy claims to have seen a connection between seven "autumnal forts" and seven rivers (op. cit. pp. 18–19), whereas the Sarasvatī River is said in RV 6.61.10 to be one out of seven sisters...

Finally, there is a stanza on invulnerable *puras* made of metal:

vrajáṃ kṛṇudhvaṃ sá hí vo nṛpā́ṇo várma sīvyadhvam bahulā́ pṛthū́ni /
púraḥ kṛṇudhvam ā́yasīr ádhṛṣṭā mā́ vaḥ susroc camasó dṛ́ṃhatā tám //

"Construct a cow-pen, for that is the drinking place of your leaders, fabricate armor manifold and ample; make fortresses of metal that are invincible, let not your ladle leak, make it strong and unbreakable" (RV 10.101.8).

Sarasvatī as an Āprī deity

The feminine noun *āprī* refers to the process of gaining someone's favor. Monier-Williams says that the plural form of this noun is the name of particular invocations spoken previous to the offering of oblations, which are different in different schools. Some authors have enumerated twelve *āprī* hymns to propitiate twelve *āprī* deities. These deities are personified objects belonging to the fire-sacrifice — the fuel, the sacred grass, the enclosure, etc. — all regarded as different forms of Agni. Hence the objects are also called *āprīs* or, according to others, the objects are the real *āprīs* from which the hymns received their names.

I take it that the *āprī* deities belong in the intermediate level — the sky, the atmosphere, the heavenly planets, *antarikṣa* — and manage the earth's natural resources according to the humans' *yajña* (or lack of it). In the execution of their jobs these intermediate deities rely on higher sources (*ṛtasya yoni*). Thus RV 1.164.47

speaks of birds that rise up to heaven robed in waters and who come back here from *ṛta*'s place; as a result of their up-and-down moves the earth is soaked in ghee.

íḷā sárasvatī mahī́ tisró devī́r mayobhúvaḥ I

barhíḥ sīdantv asrídhaḥ II

"Let Iḷā, Sarasvatī, Mahī, the three delightful [or refreshing] goddesses, sit on *kuśa* grass, they who never fail [or err]" (RV 1.13.9).

śúcir devéṣv árpitā hótrā marútsu bhā́ratī I

íḷā sárasvatī mahī́ barhíḥ sīdantu yajñíyāḥ II

"Pure in the midst of the gods, fixed, sacrificing, in the mist of the Maruts, [are] Bhāratī, Iḷā, the great Sarasvatī; let they, worthy of sacrifice, sit on *kuśa* grass" (RV 1.142.9).

bhā́ratī́ḷe sárasvati yā́ vaḥ sárvā upabruvé I

tā́ naś codayata śriyé II

"[From Agastya:] Bhāratī, Iḷā, Sarasvatī, all of whom I have invoked, let they impel us into happiness and beauty" (RV 1.188.8).

tvám agne áditir deva dāśúṣe tváṃ hótrā bhā́ratī vardhase girā́ I

tvám íḷā śatáhimāsi dákṣase tváṃ vṛtrahā́ vasupate sárasvatī II

"You, O divine Agni, [you are] Aditi for the worshiper, you thrive by the chant as sacrificing Bhāratī; you burn as Iḷā for a hundred winters, as Sarasvatī you, lord of wealth, are the killer of Vṛtra" (RV 2.1.11).

sárasvatī sādháyantī dhíyaṃ na íḷā devī́ bhā́ratī viśvátūrtiḥ I

tisró devī́ḥ svadháyā barhír édám áchidram pāntu śaraṇáṃ niṣádya II

"Sarasvatī, she who makes straight and subdues our highest thoughts, divine Iḷā and Bhāratī who are all-surpassing; may the three goddesses by their own desire [sit] on this *kuśa* grass, let them protect this unfailing shelter for [us] to rest upon" (RV 2.3.8).

ā́ bhā́ratī bhā́ratībhiḥ sajóṣā íḷā devaír manuṣyèbhir agníḥ /

sárasvatī sārasvatébhir arvā́k tisró devī́r barhír édáṃ sadantu //

"Bhāratī [may be] in harmony with the Bhāratas [females], Iḷā with the gods and Agni with the humans, Sarasvatī with the descendants of Sarasvat on this side [or on the earth]; let the three goddesses sit on *kuśa* grass" (RV 3.4.8).

íḷā sárasvatī mahī́ tisró devī́r mayobhúvaḥ /

barhíḥ sīdantv asrídhaḥ //

"Let Iḷā, Sarasvatī, Mahī, the three delighting goddesses, sit on *kuśa* grass, they who do not fail [or err]" (RV 5.5.8).

ā́ bhā́ratī bhā́ratībhiḥ sajóṣā íḷā devaír manuṣyèbhir agníḥ /

sárasvatī sārasvatébhir arvā́k tisró devī́r barhír édáṃ sadantu //

"Bhāratī [may be] in harmony with the Bhāratas [females], Iḷā with the gods and Agni with the humans, Sarasvatī with the descendants of Sarasvat on this side [or on the earth]; let the three goddesses sit on *kuśa* grass" (RV 7.2.8).

bhā́ratī pávamānasya sárasvatī́ḷā mahī́ /

imáṃ no yajñám ā́ gaman tisró devī́ḥ supéśasaḥ //

"Bhāratī [is] of Pavamāna; let Sarasvatī, Iḷā, Mahī come to this *yajña* of us, the three beautifully adorned goddesses " (RV 9.5.8).

ā́ no yajñám bhā́ratī tū́yam etv iḷā manuṣvád ihá cetáyantī |

tisró devī́r barhír édáṃ syonáṃ sárasvatī svápasaḥ sadantu ||

"Let Bhāratī arrive at our *yajña* swiftly, Iḷā, the reasonable, [be] here as [suitable] for humans; let the three goddesses [including] Sarasvatī, who are doing good work, sit on this soft *kuśa* grass" (RV 10.110.8).

Sarasvatī as *vāc*

With regard to the origin of the speculations concerning the mutual relations between the (primeval or cosmic) Waters, and especially Sarasvatī, with Vāc and the belief in the 'identity' of this river and the sacral word, attention may now be invited to the following relevant information derived from different sources. In the celebration of Vāc, RV 10.125, in which this goddess, Speech or the Word, describes her nature, functions, and influence, she prides herself on supporting Varuṇa-and-Mitra, Indra-and-Agni and other gods; on bringing wealth to the sacrificer, to the one who presses *soma*; on assuming various forms; on enabling men to eat food, to see, to breathe; on favouring and assisting those whom she loves, and so on. In st. 7 she claims to have had the Waters, the sea — that is, in all probability, the primeval waters — as the womb from which she has been born (*máma yónir apsú antáḥ samudré* [RV10.125.7]); from this beginning she spread herself all over the (inhabited) world. This conception is no more strange than the doctrine expounded in RV 10.190.1 ff. according to which the year has had the same origin. It may be doubted, if the view of the river Sarasvatī presented in MBh 9.41.29 ff. has reached back to the earlier Vedic period: here she is described as taking her rise from Grandfather's lake (*pitāmahasya sarasaḥ* [MBh 9.41]) and, filling the whole universe with her waters, she is, *inter alia*, 'identified' with Vāṇī (Speech) so as to enable men to study (the Veda). If it were allowed to combine this place with RV 10.125.7, it might perhaps be a plausible conclusion that the fact that both the sacred river and (sacral) speech were believed to have originated in the (primeval) waters had already at an early moment convinced Vedic thinkers of their identity. However, the very view of the origin of speech expressed in RV

10.125.7 may — also without contemporaneous corroboration — in all probability be regarded as an important starting-point of the conviction that Sarasvatī "is" Vāc, since the ultimate origin of the sacred river in the primeval waters was self-evident...

So the transformation of the river goddess Sarasvatī into Sarasvatī Vāc, or rather the process of splitting leading to the origin and development of a divine figure representing the sacral word beside the river deity of the same name, appears to be more complicated affair than those who have, in course of time, suggested various simple solutions of the problem would make us believe. There is no doubt that the deity Sarasvatī–Vāc owes its existence to the more or less contemporaneous existence and combined development of a number of beliefs, doctrines, associations, 'identifications' and interpretations that converged to the same result. There were Sarasvatī's association with the ritual goddesses Iḍā and Bhāratī, her identification with the cow which was associated with Vāc, the relations of the cow and the goddess with vision or inspiration (*dhī*), the belief that the primeval Waters were the source of Vāc. It is not possible completely to coordinate the various relevant facts, even less to discover the stages of one single historical development (Gonda 1985 pp. 64–66).

RV 1.3.10–12:

pāvakā́ naḥ sárasvatī vā́jebhir vājínīvatī |

yajñáṃ vaṣṭu dhiyā́vasuḥ ||

codayitrī́ sūnṛ́tānāṃ cétantī sumatīnā́m |

yajñáṃ dadhe sárasvatī ||

mahó árṇaḥ sárasvatī prá cetayati ketúnā |

dhíyo víśvā ví rājati ||

"[From Madhuchandas Vaiśvāmitra:] let the pure and bright Sarasvatī, the swift

and impetuous one [or rich in horses come forth] with rewards, let her, rich in devotion, command [our] *yajña*.

[11] "Among all the joyful ones, she is the one who animates [them], of all the good-minded [or intelligent] ones, she is the one who understands; Sarasvatī pays attention to [out] *yajña*.

[12] "Sarasvatī of the great stream causes to appear striking phenomena; she reigns over all thoughts" (RV 1.3.10–12).

śáṃ no devā́ viśvádevā bhavantu śáṃ sárasvatī sahá dhībhír astu /

śám abhiṣā́caḥ śám u rātiṣā́caḥ śáṃ no divyā́ḥ pā́rthivāḥ śáṃ no ápyāḥ //

"Let the gods, let all the gods exist for our happiness, let Sarasvatī by her divine thoughts be happily disposed; let the assistants and the givers of gifts be happily disposed, let all the atmospheric, earthly, and water-dwelling [beings] be for our happiness" (RV 7.35.11).

To all this we may add some of the passages on Sarasvatī quoted earlier, which can be read either as referring to the river or to *vāc*:

"[May] she, rich in *ṛta*, [send] to us all her other sisters [who are] beyond the enemies, like Sūrya [sends] the day" (RV 6.61.9). The next stanza, 6.61.10, explains that Sarasvatī is one in a group of seven sisters. Sarasvatī as *vāc* sends knowledge wrapped in the seven Vedic meters (or seven languages), whereas as a higher-level river she sends out the *sapta-sindhavaḥ*, the group of seven rivers onto earth. In RV 7.36.6 she is *saptathī* (the seventh), which may refer there to the seven meters (or seven languages), whereas in RV 8.59.4 we are told that at the dwelling place of *ṛta* seven sisters are found engaged in pouring out ghee.

"She who has a triple seat, [being] sevenfold, she is the promoter of the five

peoples [i.e. she makes them prosper]; in every battle she is to be invoked. She, with majesty in the midst of all powers, may become manifest with all the splendor, she is different, the most skillful [or rapid] of the skilled ones; large as a chariot, built by Vibhvan [a heavenly artificer who carved her river bed], good to be praised, Sarasvatī is experienced" (RV 6.61.12–13).

As I said earlier, the Ṛg-vedic poets do not seem interested in compartmentalizing Sarasvatī — Sarasvatī as *vāc*, as an Āprī deity, as a river. Thus in RV1.164 the first line of stanza 42 is dedicated to *vāc* whereas its second line is dedicated to the waters; stanza 45 is dedicated to *vāc*; stanza 49 is dedicated to Sarasvatī.

"From her flow the oceans here and there; by this live the four directions; from this [*parama vyoman* "the highest heaven"] flows out the immutable [or the syllable]; upon this everything lives.

"In four quarters is measured *vāc*; the *brāhmaṇas* who know these [four], they are thoughtful; three of them are kept in secret and do not shake; the fourth *vāc*, the humans speak.

"That ever-flowing breast of yours is causing delight [or refreshment], by it you nourish all valuables; this supporter of jewels and bestower of treasures is granting good gifts; O Sarasvatī, [place] that here [for us] to suck" (RV 1.164.42, 45, 49).

Interestingly, while Sarasvatī is simultaneously a river and *vāc*, there is one verbal root (√*nad*) from which words are derived to refer to both sound and water, *nada* / *nadī*, the first meaning "sound" and the second, "river." Then the word *akṣara* has

multiple meanings: sound, word, cow in RV 3.31.6, and even water/rain in RV 1.34.4, 1.164.42.

In RV 1.164.45 four parts of cow / *vāc* are spoken of — the third one, *madhyamā vāc*, is understood by sages (*vaidika*) and the fourth one, *vaikharī vāc*, is spoken by people (*laukika*). Furthermore, *madhyamā vāc* is *antaḥ samudra*, the source of *vaikharī vāc* (RV 10.125.7).

CHAPTER 5: SARASVATĪ IN THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

In the *Mahābhārata* Sarasvatī is depicted in two of her features: as *vāc* and as the best of all rivers. Her role as an Āprī deity is not mentioned any longer. Whether she is still a deity of the intermediate level is an understood issue not made explicit in the text. I would suggest that a major ideological change has taken place — plus a subsequent change in the humans–nature relationship — that has not rendered the Ṛg-vedic *yajñas* obsolete, yet appears to have circumscribed them to more reduced spheres on earth while they may retain their full validity in higher realms. This is something that will need to be looked at closely, elsewhere.

The second difference between this chapter and the previous one is that the sheer magnitude of the *Mahā-bhārata* ("the huge set of narratives related to the Bhāratas") has kept me from reviewing every occurrence of the word *sarasvatī* in it. In what follows, then, I will present a sample of the passages found in a few places, which I think will make a fairly accurate picture of Sarasvatī in the *Mahābhārata.*

Sarasvatī as *vāc*

nārayaṇaṃ namas-kṛtya naraṃ caiva narottamam
devīṃ sarasvatīṃ vyāsaṃ tato jayam udīrayet

"Obeisances are to be offered to Nārayaṇa and to Nara, the supreme human being, to divine Sarasvatī and to Vyāsa; then victory should come about" (MBh 1.1.1).

The passage that follows carries reminiscences of the Āprī deities:

MBh 2.7.17–18:

divyā āpas tathā oṣadhyaḥ śraddhā medhā sarasvatī/

artho dharmaś ca kāmaś ca vidyutaś cāpi pāṇḍava//

jala vāhās tathā meghā vāyavaḥ stanayitnavaḥ/

prācī dig yajña vāhāś ca pāvakāḥ sapta viṁśatiḥ//

"Also present [in Indra's divine assembly hall] are the divine Waters, and the healing Herbs, along with Faith, Intelligence, Sarasvatī, Profit, Piety, Desire, and Lightning, O Pāṇḍava; and the water-bearing clouds, the winds, thunder, the East, and the 27 fires that carry the sacrificial rite" (MBh 2.7.17–18).

As we may remember, we heard earlier (in the section on *ṛta* in chapter 2) that "the moistening powers [or the healing herbs] of *ṛta* are manifold" (RV 4.23.8).

sarasvatīm īraya veda juṣṭām eka akṣarām bahu rūpām virājam/

aṅga ātmānam samavekṣasva bālam kim ślāghase durlabhā vāda siddhiḥ//

"[Speak of] Sarasvatī, she who is liked for having brought to life the *Vedas*, she who has one syllable and many forms, she who is brilliant" (MBh 3.133.8).

śriyam lakṣmīm ca kīrtim ca pṛthivīm ca kakudminīm/

vedānām mātaram paśya mat sthām devīm sarasvatīm//

"Looking at Śriyā, Lakṣmī, Kīrti, Pṛthivī, and Kakudmī, and the mother of the *Vedas*, divine Sarasvatī, who abides in me [Bhagavan]" (MBh 12.326.53).

na ukta pūrvam mayā kṣudram aślīlam vā kadācana/

ṛtā brahma sutā sā me satyā devī sarasvatī//

"Any vile or vulgar language was never spoken by me before; mine she is, [female] *ṛta*, the daughter of *bráhman*, pesonified truth [or reality], divine Sarasvatī" (MBh 12.330.10).

Sarasvatī as a river

MBh 1.90.25–28:

matināraḥ khalu sarasvatyāṃ/

dvādaśa-vārṣikaṃ satram ājahāra//

nivṛtte ca satre sarasvaty abhigamya taṃ bhartāraṃ/

varayām āsa tasyāṃ putram ajanayat taṃsuṃ nāma//

atrānuvaṃśo bhavati//

taṃsuṃ sarasvatī putraṃ matinārād ajījanat/

ilinaṃ janayām āsa kālindyāṃ taṃsur ātma-jam//

[25] "Matināra [a descendant of Pūru] performed a twelve-year sacrifice on the bank of the Sarasvatī River,

[26] "when the sacrifice was finished Sarasvatī herself approached him and selected him as her husband. He then begot in her a son named Taṃsu.

[27] "The lineage that descends from this noble couple is as follows:

[28] "Sarasvatī gave birth to a son named Taṃsu by Matināra, and Taṃsu begot in Kālindī a son named Ilina" (MBh 1.90.25–28).

MBh 2.9.18–19:

tathā samudrāś catvāro nadī bhāgīrathī ca yā/
kālindī vidiśā veṇṇā narmadā vega vāhinī//
vipāśā ca śatadruś ca candra bhāgā sarasvatī/
irāvatī vitastā ca sindhur deva nadas tathā//

[18] "And there [in Varuṇa's divine assembly hall] the four oceans, and rivers like Bhāgīrathī, Kālindī, Vidiśā, Veṇṇā, Narmadā, Vega-vāhinī;

[19] "Vipāśā, and Śatadru, Candra-bhāgā, and Sarasvatī, Irāvatī, Vitastā, and Sindhu, and Deva-nada [or Sindhu as a divine river]" (MBh 2.9.18–19)

śūdra ābhīra gaṇāś caiva ye ca āśritya sarasvatīm/
vartayanti ca ye matsyair ye ca parvata vāsinaḥ//

"[Nakula conquered] all the hosts of Śūdras and Ābhīras that dwell by the Sarasvatī, and those who live by fish, and those who dwell in the mountains" (MBh 2.29.9).

The above stanza reminds one of another in the *Ṛg-veda*: "Citra is indeed a king, petty princes are indeed others who live along the Sarasvatī" (RV 8.21.18).

MBh 3.6.1–3:

pāṇḍavās tu vane vāsam uddiśya bharata ṛṣabhāḥ /
prayayur jāhnavī kūlāt kurukṣetram saha anugāḥ//
sarasvatī dṛṣadvatyau yamunām ca niṣevya te/
yayur vanena eva vanam satatam paścimām diśam//
tataḥ sarasvatī kūle sameṣu maru dhanvasu/
kāmyakam nāma dadṛśur vanam muni jana priyam.//

[1] "The Pāṇḍavas, bulls of the Bharatas, to sojourn in the woods departed with their followers from the bank of the Gaṅgā for Kurukṣetra.

[2] "They visited both the Sarasvatī and the Dṛṣadvatī and also the Yamunā, and traveled from forest to forest, always in a westerly direction.

[3] "Then amidst the desert plains on the banks of the Sarasvatī they found the forest called Kāmyaka, which is very dear to the hermit crowd" (MBh 3.6.1–3).

tat kānanam prāpya nara indra putrāḥ sukha ucitā vāsam upetya kṛcchram/
vijahrur indra pratimāḥ śiveṣu sarasvatī śāla vaneṣu teṣu//

"Having reached that forest, the human sons of Indra [Pāṇḍavas] having obtained easy and pleasurable living and hardship, walked about at leisure [like] reflections of Indra in the benign forests of *śāla* trees by the Sarasvatī" (MBh 3.26.1).

MBh 3.80.74, 79, 82–85, 118, 130:

tato gaccheta dharmajña himavat sutam arbudam/
pṛthivyām yatra vai chidram pūrvam āsīd yudhiṣṭhira//

tato gaccheta dharmajña prabhāsam loka viśrutam/
yatra samnihito nityam svayam eva huta aśanaḥ/
devatānām mukham vīra analo anila sārathiḥ//

tato gatvā sarasvatyāḥ sāgarasya ca samgame/
go sahasra phalam prāpya svarga loke mahīyate/
dīpyamāno agnivan nityam prabhayā bharata ṛṣabha//

tato dvāravatīm gacchen niyato niyata aśanaḥ/
piṇḍārake naraḥ snātvā labhed bahu suvarṇakam//

tasmiṃs tīrthe mahā bhāga padma lakṣaṇa lakṣitāḥ/
adyāpi mudrā dṛśyante tad adbhutam arimdama//
triśūlākṣāni padmāni dṛśyante kuru nandana/
mahā devasya sāmnidhyam tatraiva bharata ṛṣabha//
sāgarasya ca sindhoś ca samgamam prāpya bhārata/
tīrthe salila rājasya snātvā prayata mānasaḥ//

tato vinaśanam gacchen niyato niyata aśanaḥ/
gacchaty antar hitā yatra maru pṛṣṭhe sarasvatī/
camase ca śivodbhede nāgodbhede ca dṛśyate//

tato gaccheta rājendra samgamam loka viśrutam/
sarasvatyā mahā puṇyam upāsante janārdanam//

[74] "[After traveling to the river Narmadā, and the Southern River, and the Carmaṇvatī] then one goes on to Arbuda, the son of Himālaya, where formerly there was a cleft in the earth.

[79] "Then one should go to the world-famous Prabhāsa, where the oblation-carrying fire is always present in person, the wind-driven fire, the mouth of the gods.

[82] "Then after going to the confluence of the Sarasvatī and the ocean, and after obtaining a reward [equivalent to] a thousand cows, in the glorious world of heaven one is blazing forever with splendor like fire.

[82–83] "[After going from there to Varadāna] one should proceed to Dvāravatī [Dvārakā]... In this pilgrimage site signs with lotuses are observed; even nowadays seals are seen; this is a marvelous home of faithfulness.

[84] "Lotuses marked with tridents are seen there, in the presence of the great god

[i.e. where Kṛṣṇa lives].

[85] "Having reached the confluence of the ocean and the Sindhu [one should bathe] at the pilgrimage site of the king of the water [Varuṇa].

[118] "Then one should go to Vinaśana, where the Sarasvatī disappears in the desert and reappears at Camasodbheda, Śivodbheda, and Nāgodbheda.

[130] "Then [right before going to Kurukṣetra] one should go to the famous and greatly auspicious area of confluence with Sarasvatī" (MBh 3.80.74, 77, 79, 82–85, 118, 130).

MBh 3.81.3, 125, 175:

atra māsam vased vīra   sarasvatyām yudhiṣṭhira/
yatra brahmādayo deva   ṛṣayaḥ siddha cāraṇāḥ//

puṇyam āhuḥ kurukṣetram   kurukṣetrāt sarasvatīm/
sarasvatyāś ca tīrthāni   tīrthebhyaś ca pṛthūdakam//

dakṣiṇena sarasvatyā   uttareṇa dṛṣadvatīm /
ye vasanti kurukṣetre te vasanti triviṣṭape//

[3] "One should dwell for a month by the Sarasvatī, O Yudhiṣṭhira, where the gods led by Brahmā, the seers, Siddhas, Cāraṇas. Gandharvas, Apsarās, Yakṣas, and Snakes visit holy Brahma-kṣetra.

[125] "They call Kurukṣetra holy, but holier than Kurukṣetra is the Sarasvatī, holier than the Sarasvatī are the pilgrimage sites, and holier than the pilgrimage sites is Pṛthūdaka.

[175] "With the south away from the Sarasvatī [i.e. south of the Sarasvatī], with the north away from the Dṛṣadvatī [north of the Dṛṣadvatī], those who live in

Kurukṣetra live in the third [highest] heaven" (MBh 3.81.3, 125, 175).

MBh 3.82.5–6:

tato hi sā sarit śreṣṭhā nadīnām uttamā nadī/
plakṣād devī srutā rājan mahā-puṇyā sarasvatī//
tatra abhiṣekam kurvīta valmīkān niḥsṛte jale/
arcayitvā pitṝn devān aśvamedha phalam labhet//

[5] "O king, then there is the best of streams, the topmost of rivers, flowing from Plakṣa, the greatly auspicious divine Sarasvatī.

[6] "One should take a bath there in the water that comes forth from an anthill; having worshipped the forefathers and gods, one gains the result of an *aśvamedha* sacrifice" (MBh 3.82.5–6).

MBh 3.88.2–3, 9:

sarasvatī puṇya vahā hradinī vana-mālinī/
samudragā mahā vegā yamunā yatra pāṇḍava//
tatra puṇyatamam tīrtham plakṣa avataraṇam śivam/
yatra sārasvatair iṣṭvā gacchanty avabhṛtham dvijāḥ//

sarasvatī nadī sadbhiḥ satatam pārtha pūjitā/
vālakhilyair mahā-rāja yatra iṣṭam ṛṣibhiḥ purā//

[2] "[In the north] there is Sarasvatī, she who carries along [or effects] virtue, who abounds in lakes, who is garlanded with forests [or wears a garland of forest flowers], and Yamunā, she who goes to the ocean, the greatly impetuous one.

[3] "There is the most meritorious pilgrimage site, descending at the auspicious

Plakṣa [the place of the pipal tree]; there, having longed for [Sarasvatī] with the *sārasvata* rites, the Brāhmaṇas go and sink down [or perform a purificatory ritual].

[9] "The river Sarasvatī is constantly worshiped by the wise people; with the Vālakhilya hymns [RV 8.49–59] there, from old and up to the present time, she is sought after by the sages" (MBh 3.88.2–3, 9).

MBh 3.174.21–24:

ataś ca yātvā marudhanva pārśvam sadā dhanus-veda rati pradhānāḥ/
sarasvatīm etya nivāsa kāmāh saras tato dvaitavanam pratīyuḥ//
samīksya tān daitavane niviṣṭān nivāsinas tatra tato abhijagmuḥ/
tapo dama ācāra samādhi yuktās tṛṇa uda pātra āharaṇa aśma kuṭṭāḥ//
plakṣa akṣa rauhītaka vetasāś ca snuhā badaryaḥ khadirāḥ śirīṣāḥ/
bilva iṅgudāḥ pīlu śamī karīrāh sarasvatī tīraruhā babhūvḥ//
tām yakṣa gandharva maharṣi kāntām āyāga bhūtām iva devatānām/
sarasvatīm prīti yutāś carantah sukham vijahrur nara deva putrāḥ//

[21] "Thereafter they [the five Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī] went to the desert's edge, those men devoted to archery; and coming to the river Sarasvatī, sought out Lake Dvaita, to settle there.

[22] "On seeing them come to Dvaitavana ["the Dvaita forest"] and settling there, the ascetics arrived, subdued, behaved, contemplative folk, with water, straw, vessels, food, grinding stones.

[23] "Fig trees, nut trees, *rohītakas*, cane, and spurges and jujubes, *khadiras*, *śirīṣas*, *bilvas*, *ingudas*, *pilus*, *śamis* and thorns covered the river Sarasvatī's banks.

[24] "That [feminine] is dear to the seers, Gandharvas, and Yakṣas, as if obtained

by the sacrifice of the gods; in a friendly disposition the associates pleasantly ranged the Sarasvatī, the human sons of gods gave up comfort" (MBh 3.174.21–24).

ākāśa nīkāśa taṭām nīpa nīvāra saṃkulām/
babhūva caratāṃ harṣaḥ puṇya tīrthāṃ sarasvatīm//

"Her banks having open space [at some places] or being completely filled [at other places], abounding in kadambas and wild rice; they [the Pāṇḍavas] ranged happily Sarasvatī's virtuous pilgrimage sites" (MBh 3.179.14).

MBh 6.7.44–45, 47:

atra tripathagā devī prathamam tu pratiṣṭhitā/
brahma lokād apakrāntā saptadhā pratipadyate//
vasv oka sārā nalinī pāvanā ca sarasvatī/
jambūnadī ca sītā ca gaṅgā sindhuś ca saptamī//

dṛśya adṛśyā ca bhavati tatra tatra sarasvatī/
etā divyāḥ sapta gaṅgās triṣu lokeṣu viśrutāḥ//

[44] "There the divine [stream] that flows on three levels first stood fixed, issuing out of Brahma-loka, and then divided herself into seven.
[45] "Vasuokasārā, Nalinī, the purifying Sarasvatī, the river Jambū, Sītā, Gaṅgā, and Sindhu as the seventh.
[47] "Sarasvatī became at some places visible and at other places invisible; the seven divine *gaṅgās* [a generic word for river] are famous in the three worlds"

(MBh 6.7.44–45, 47).

MBh 9.37.3–4:

rājan sapta sarasvatyo yābhir vyāptam idam jagat/
āhūta balavadbhir hi tatra tatra sarasvatī//
suprabhā kāñcana akṣī ca viśālā mānasa hradā/
sarasvatī oghavatī suveṇur vimala udakāḥ//

[3] "O king, the seven Sarasvatīs cover this universe; wherever Sarasvatī was called by persons of great energy, there she [came].

[4] "Sarsavatī is Suprabhā, Kāñcanākṣī, Viśalā, Mānasa-hradā, Oghavatī, Suvenū, Vimalodaka. (MBh 9.37.3–4).

ṣoḍaśa strī sahasrāṇi vāsudeva parigrahaḥ/
nyamajjanta sarasvatyām kālena janamejaya/
tāś cāpy apsaraso bhūtvā vāsudevam upāgaman//

"Sixteen thousand women had been married to Vāsudeva; in due course of time, O Janamejaya, they plunged into the Sarasvatī; transformed into Apsaras, they approached Vāsudeva [in heaven]" (MBh 18.5.21).

Plakṣa Prasravaṇa, Vinaśana, Prabhāsa

"Then there is the best of streams, the topmost of rivers, flowing from Plakṣa, the greatly auspicious divine Sarasvatī. One should take a bath there in the water that comes forth from an anthill" (MBh 3.82.5–6).

Sarasvatī springs out at Plakṣa Prasravaṇa ("the spring of the pipal tree"). The expression *plakṣa prasravaṇa* appears first in the *Brāhmaṇas.* The pipal tree is said in *Bhagavad-gītā* to be a symbol of the Vedic hymns and of the human existence (MBh 6.37.1–4).

> By means of the Sarasvatī, the Gods propped the sun but she could not sustain it and collapsed; hence it (the Sarasvatī) is full of bendings (*Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 25.10.11).
>
> They [the devotees taking *dīkṣā*] move against the stream, for it is not (possible) to reach (the term going) along the stream (PVB 25.10.12). [And Caland's note:] This seems simply to imply that only by going against the stream of the Sarasvatī, which flows from east to west, can they reach the term (Plakṣa Prasravaṇa) which is situated to the east.
>
> At a distance of a journey of forty days on horseback from the spot where the Sarasvatī is lost (in the sands of the desert) (is situated) Plakṣa Prasravaṇa. At the same distance form here (from the earth) (is situated) the world of heaven: they go to the world of heaven by a journey commensurate with the Sarasvatī (PVB 25.10.16).
>
> When they reach Plakṣa Prasravaṇa they perform an *iṣṭi* [sacrifice] for Agni Kāma... (PVB 25.10.22).
>
> At Kārapacava they descend for the lustral bath into the Yamunā (PVB 25.10.23).

etat plakṣāvataraṇam yamunā tīrtham ucyate/

etad vaināka pṛṣṭhasya dvāram āhur manīṣiṇaḥ//

"This pilgrimage site at [near] the Yamunā they call it Plakṣa-avataraṇa [the descending place by the pipal tree]; this, the sages say, is the door to the vault of heaven" (MBh 3.129.13).

Mbh 3.130.3–5:

eṣā sarasvatī puṇyā divyā coghavatī nadī/
etad vinaśanam nāma sarasvatyā viśām pate //
dvāram niṣāda rāṣṭrasya yeṣām dveṣāt sarasvatī/
praviṣṭā pṛthivīm vīra mā niṣādā hi mām viduḥ//
eṣa vai camasa udbhedo yatra dṛśyā sarasvatī/
yatra enām abhyavartanta divyāḥ puṇyāḥ samudra gāḥ//

[3] "This is Sarasvatī, the auspicious, divine river who has a strong stream; this is called Vinaśana [the disappearance, the vanishing point] of Sarasvatī.

[4] "O hero, it is the gateway to the Niṣāda kingdom, out of hatred for whom the Sarasvatī entered the earth, thinking, 'they should not know [see] me.'

[5] "This is the Camasa spring, where Sarasvatī can be seen, and here converge into her all the divine, auspicious, ocean-bound [rivers]" (Mbh 3.130.3–5).

Vinaśana (disappearance) is understood both in a spatial and in a temporal sense. Sarasvatī goes underground at this place because it marks the beginning of *mleccha-deśa*, and she does it at a particular point in time because of major historical/ideological changes. In other words, Sarasvatī, the *pur* of the *āryas* as a river and as *vāc*, is only visible during the time and in the place where *āryas* practice the Sanskrit language and a *bráhman*-based ideology.

Elsewhere the *Mahābhārata* says:

snigdhatvād oṣadhīnām ca bhūmeś ca janamejaya/
jānanti siddhā rāja indra naṣṭām api sarasvatīm

"Because of the unctuousness of the healing herbs and of the land there, people endowed with supernatural faculties know that Sarasvatī has become invisible [or

escaped]" (MBh 9.34.81).

MBh 9.36.1–2:

tato vinaśanam rājann āyudhaḥ/
śūdra ābhīrān prati dveṣād yatra naṣṭā sarasvatī//
yasmāt sā bharata śreṣṭha dveṣān naṣṭā sarasvatī/
tasmāt tad ṛṣayo nityam prāhur vinaśana iti ha//

[1] "Then Baladeva, O King, proceeded to Vinaśana, where the Sarasvatī had become lost out of contempt for Sūdras and Abhīras.

[2] "Since Sarasvatī was lost out of contempt the *ṛṣis* always name this place Vinaśana [Sarasvatī's disappearance, and the cause of frustration for Sūdras and Abhīras]" (MBh 9.36.1–2).

No statement is found in the *Mahābhārata* Critical Edition about Sarasvatī's reaching the ocean near Prabhāsa. Yet in some of the *Mahābhārata* manuscripts Prabhāsa is said to be the area where Sarasvatī's mouth was located before she changed her course in many ways to finally go underground (see Dwivedi 1975 p. 163). In a passage quoted earlier (MBh 3.80.74–85) a pilgrimage tour is described, in which after visiting the Narmadā and another two rivers the pilgrim reaches Prabhāsa. Moving westwards, he then proceeds to the point of confluence of the Sarasvatī and the ocean, then on to Dvārakā, and on to the mouth of the Sindhu, where the pious route turns north.

MBh 1.210.2–4:

samudre paścime yāni tīrthāny āyatanāni ca/

tāni sarvāṇi gatvā sa prabhāsam upajagmivān//

prabhāsa-deśaṃ samprāptaṃ bībhatsum aparājitam/

tīrthāny anucarantaṃ ca śuśrāva madhu-sūdanaḥ//

tato abhyagacchat kaunteyam ajñāto nāma mādhavaḥ

dadṛśāte tadānyonyaṃ prabhāse kṛṣṇa-pāṇḍavau

[2] "In the course of visiting all the holy places and shrines on the western coast, he [Arjuna] reached Prabhāsa.

[3] "Madhu-sūdana heard that Arjuna had reached Prabhāsa and was visiting the holy places, one after the other.

[4] "Kṛṣṇa then came incognito to meet the Pāṇḍava [Arjuna] and they saw each other at Prabhāsa" (MBh 1.210.2–4).

MBh 3.86.17, 21:

camasa unmajjanam viprās tatrāpi kathayanty uta/

prabhāsam ca udadhau tīrtham tridaśānām yudhiṣṭhira//

puṇyā dvāravatī tatra yatra āste madhu-sūdanaḥ/

sākṣād devaḥ purāṇo asau sa hi dharmaḥ sanātanaḥ//

[17] "The Brāhmaṇas speak there of Camasonmajjana and, on the sea, the pilgrimage site called Prabhāsa of the thirty gods, O Yudhiṣṭhira.

[21] "There, too, is holy Dvāravatī, where Madhu-sūdana is [residing]; he is visibly the divine Purāṇa, he indeed is eternal *dharma*" (MBh 3.86.17, 21).

prabhāsa tīrtham samprāpya puṇyam tīrtham mahā udadheḥ

"They [the Pāṇḍavas and the Vṛṣṇis] encountered one another at the pilgrimage site of Prabhāsa, the holy site of the big ocean" (MBh 3.119.3).

Balarāma's tour

I shall wind up this chapter, and my research, by quoting from the description of Balarāma's tour along the Sarasvatī River, upstream from Prabhāsa and up to Plakṣa Prasravaṇa. We shall hear a *bráhman*-based account to explain some of the changes in the river course through the ages, comparable to Sarasvatī's own motivation for disappearing underground at a certain geographical location. It is in this way that a whole range of geographical, meteorological, and geological facts find their place within the framework of a *bráhman*-based ideology.

MBh 9.34.15–18:

ānayadhvam dvārakāyā agnīn vai yājakāms tathā//
suvarṇam rajatam caiva dhenur vāsāmsi vājinaḥ/
kuñjarāṃś ca rathāṃś caiva khara uṣṭram vāhanāni ca/
kṣipram ānīyatām sarvam tīrtha hetoḥ paricchadam//
pratisrotaḥ sarasvatyā gachadhvam śīghra gāminaḥ/
ṛtvijaś ca ānayadhvam vai śataśaś ca dvija-ṛṣabhān//
tīrtha yātrām yayau rājan kurūṇām vaiśase tadā/
sarasvatīm pratisrotaḥ samudrād abhijagmivān//

"[Balarāma is about to set out on a pilgrimage along the Sarasvatī; he orders his servants:] 'Bring the fire from Dvārakā and the sacrificers. Bring gold, silver, cows, clothes, horses, elephants, chariots, donkeys, camels [or buffaloes], and other conveyances. Bring everything quickly, all the necessaries for traveling to the pilgrimage sites. Up the stream of the Sarasvatī, set out swiftly and move on; bring also priests and hundreds of twice-born sages.'

"The procession moved swiftly to the pilgrimage sites at the time of the war of the Kurus; going upstream along the Sarasvatī, from the ocean onwards" (MBh 9.34.15–18).

"Baladeva first proceeded to the pilgrimage site called Prabhāsa. There Soma, who had been affected by a severe disease, became freed from the course that was affecting him. Regaining energy there, he now illuminates the universe. Because that foremost of pilgrimage sites on earth had formerly contributed to invest Soma with splendor, it is called Prabhāsa [from the verb *pra√bhā*, to shine forth]" (MBh 9.34.66–70).

"Baladeva set out with the face towards the east and reached, one after another, hundreds and thousands of famous pilgrimage sites, which occurred at every step... He once more set out along the way that the ascetics pointed out to him to reach that spot where the Sarasvatī turns in an eastward direction, like torrents of rain bent by the action of the wind. The river took that course for beholding the high-souled *ṛsis* dwelling in the forest of Naimiṣa. Always smeared with white sandal paste, and beholding the change of course of that foremost of rivers, Baladeva became filled with wonder...

"Formerly, in the Kṛta age, the ascetics dwelling in Naimiṣa were engaged in a grand sacrifice extending for twelve years. Many were the *ṛṣis* that came to that sacrifice... On account of the number of *ṛsis*, the pilgrimage sites on the southern banks of the Sarasvatī all looked like towns and cities...

"All the ascetics came to a spot in the vicinity of the Sarasvatī... hundreds and

hundreds of *ṛsis*... They failed to find sufficient room on the banks of the Sarasvatī. Measuring small plots of land with their sacred threads, they performed their *agnihotras*...

"Sarasvatī beheld that large body of *ṛsis* who were penetrated with despair and plunged into anxiety for want of a broad site where to perform their rites. For their sake, that foremost of streams came there, having made many abodes for herself in that spot out of kindness for those *ṛṣis* of sacred penances. Having thus turned her course for their sake, Sarasvatī, that foremost of rivers, once more flowed in a westerly direction as if she said, 'I must go there, having prevented the arrival of the *ṛṣis* from becoming futile.' This wonderful feat was accomplished by that great river...

"Beholding those many receptacles of water, seeing that foremost of rivers turn her course, wonder filled the heart of the high-souled Rāma" (MBh 9.36.33–57).

"Baladeva then went to that spot where Ruṣaṅgu had in former days cast off his body. Ruṣaṅgo was an old Brāhmaṇa... he summoned his sons and told them to take him to a spot where water was abundant... They took him to a pilgrimage site on the Sarasvatī. Brought by his sons to the sacred Sarasvatī containing hundreds of pilgrimage sites and on whose banks dwelt *ṛsis* unconnected with the world, that intelligent ascetic bathed in that site... and then said to his sons: 'Whoever casts off his body on the northern bank of the Sarasvatī containing much water, while mentally reciting sacred mantras, will never again be afflicted by death" (MBh 9.38.23–29).

"[Viśvāmitra, while having a quarrel with Vasiṣṭha, thought to himself:] 'This Sarasvatī shall quickly bring, by force of her current, that foremost of ascetics {Vasiṣṭha] to my presence. After he is brought here I shall, without doubt, slay that foremost of regenerate the ones.' Having settled this, the illustrious and great *ṛṣi* Viśvāmitra, his eyes red in wrath, thought of that foremost of rivers. Thus remembered by the ascetic, she became exceedingly agitated. The beautiful lady, however, repaired to that *ṛsi* of great energy and wrath. Pale and trembling, Sarasvatī, with joined hands appeared before that foremost of sages. Indeed, she was much afflicted with grief, like a woman who has lost her mighty husband. And she said unto that best of sages: 'Tell me what is there that I shall do for you.' Filled with rage, the ascetic said to her: 'Bring here Vasiṣṭha without delay, so that I may slay him.' Hearing these words, the river became agitated. With joined hands, the lotus-eyed lady began to tremble exceedingly in fear as if a creeper shaken by the wind. Beholding the great river in that plight, the ascetic said to her: 'Without scruple, bring Vasiṣṭha into my presence.' Hearing these words of his and knowing the evil he intended to do, and acquainted also with the prowess of Vasiṣṭha that was unrivaled on earth, she repaired to Vasiṣṭha and formed him what the intelligent Viśvāmitra had said to her. Fearing the course of both, she trembled repeatedly. Indeed, her heart was on the grievous curse. She stood in terror of both. Seeing her pale and plunged into anxiety, the righteous-souled Vasiṣṭha, that foremost of men, said these words to her: 'O foremost of rivers, save yourself. O you of rapid current, bear me away, otherwise Viśvāmitra will curse you. Do not feel any scruple.'

"Hearing these words of that compassionate *ṛṣi*, the river began to think as to what course would be best for her to follow. These were the thoughts that arose in her

mind: 'Vasiṣṭha showed great compassion for me. It is proper for me that I should serve him.' Beholding then that best of *ṛsis* engaged in silent recitation on her bank, and seeing Kuśika's son [Viśvāmitra] also engaged in offering oblations, Sarasvatī thought: 'This is my opportunity.' Then that foremost of rivers, by her current, washed away one of her banks. In washing away that bank, she bore Vasiṣṭha away. While being borne away, Vasiṣṭha praised the river with these words:

"'From the Grandfather's [Manasa] lake you have taken your rise, O Sarasvatī. This whole universe is filled with your excellent waters. Traveling through the sky, O goddess, you give your waters to the clouds. All the waters are yours. Through you we exercise our thinking faculties. You are Puṣṭī, Dyutī, Siddhī, Umā. You are speech, you are *svāhā*. This whole universe is depending on you. It is you who dwells in all beings, in four forms.'

"Thus praised by the great *ṛṣi*, Sarasvatī speedily bore that Brāhmaṇa towards Viśvāmitra's place, and repeatedly represented to the latter the arrival of the former. Beholding Vasiṣṭha thus brought before him by Sarasvatī, Viśvāmitra, filled with rage, began to look for a weapon to kill that Brāhmaṇa. Seeing him filled with wrath, the river, fearing a Brāhmaṇa's slaughter, quickly bore Vasiṣṭha away to her eastern bank once more. She thus had obeyed the words of both, although she deceived the son of Gadhi by her act. Seeing that best of *ṛṣis* [Vasiṣṭha] borne away, the vindictive Viśvāmitra, filled with wrath, addressed Sarasvatī saying: 'Since, O foremost of rivers, you have gone away, having deceived me, let your current be changed into blood good enough for Rakṣasas.' Then, cursed by the intelligent Viśvāmitra, Sarasvatī flowed for a whole year bearing blood mixed with water" (MBh 9.41.11–39).

Interestingly, during the monsoons such rivers as the Ravi (Irāvatī) and the Sutlej (Śatadru) do in fact run red and their water becomes undrinkable. "During those times, the archaeologist Mark Kenoyer has remarked, the rivers are more a curse than a blessing" (personal communication).

I conclude this partial account of Balarāma's upstream tour by quoting the stanza that mentions the river's source:

prabhavam ca sarasvatyāḥ plakṣa prasravaṇam balaḥ/
samprāptaḥ kāra pacanam tīrtha pravaram uttamam//

"[While ascending the Himalaya] prominent with Sarasvatī, Balarāma [saw] Plakṣa Prasravaṇa; he next reached another excellent pilgrimage site called Kārapacava [by the Yamunā's source]" (MBh 9.53.11).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In chapter 2, on recent archaeological and geological findings, we see that starting with Sir Auriel Stein in the early 40's some effort has been put into finding the remains of the old Sarasvatī River, so conspicuous by her active presence in the *Ṛg-veda* and by her visible absence in today's Thar desert. Numerous dried river beds and long-ago abandoned settlements have been found in the area that spans from the Gaṅgā to the Sindhu. Several hypotheses have been advanced to explain the drastic changes the river Sarasvatī underwent in the past: the lost of mayor tributaries, tectonic movements, climatic changes, etc. Satellite photographs taken in the early 70's help trace out the successive river beds at times when she would reach the Indian Ocean and would be gradually shifting her course westwards. Moreover, the analysis of well water along the dried Sarasvatī courses yields clear water from a depth of 30–40 meters, whereas at adjacent areas well water is muddy and saline. Some authors have suggested that the oldest course of the Sarasvatī would reach the ocean along the lower course of today's Luni River. Not far from this oldest mouth would have been established, in later times, the pilgrimage site called Prabhāsa and the city of Dvārakā.

Chapter 3 contains an analysis of the main concepts this work is based on, covering dictionary definitions as well as illustrative passages from my two main primary sources, the *Ṛg-veda* and the *Mahābhārata*. The concepts analyzed therein are: *ārya*, *dāsa /dasyu*, *mleccha*, *bráhman*, *prakṛti*, *ṛta*, *dharma*, *vāc*, and ideology. To this I have added a brief description of some continuities and changes from the language of the *Ṛg-veda* to that of the *Mahābhārata*, knowing well that it is not the purpose of my present work to elucidate the specific type of linguistic links between both texts. I

suggest there, again as the subject of further research, that if a more "verbal" or "active" language is found in the *Ṛg-veda* it may turn fruitful to explore the possible connections between this kind of language and the practice of ritual as the main type of humans-nature relationship in Ṛg-vedic times.

Chapter 4 covers all the passages where the word *sarasvatī* appears in the *Ṛg-veda* — she is in 46 hymns found in nine out of the ten Ṛg-vedic Maṇḍalas. No other river is mentioned that often in the *Ṛg-veda* . Sarasvatī is found to have a triple personality, i.e. to be not only a three-tiered river, but also an Āprī (atmospheric or middle-range) deity, and the ultimate word or language, *vāc*, which dwells in a higher realm as well as in the hearts of her devotees — both esoteric locations (*guha*). These three facets of Sarasvatī's personality are such that it is practically impossible to compartmentalize them for analysis' sake. She is praised as a supernatural (*asurya*) river, she is asked for large quantities and fine quality of wealth; she is beautiful and seems to be enjoying herself all the time; she is also a fortress of metal; she favors her friends, so much so that she will literally "go out of her way" for their sake. Even as a mere river she is found on three levels and always as part of a group of seven sisters, which the humans consider their mothers. As *vāc* she is intimately connected with *bráhman*; she is highly intelligent and hard to understand. Like *bráhman*, she is one but the sages have made her many.

Chapter 5 contains a sample of the Sarasvatī-related passages in the *Mahābhārata*. In the *Mahābhārata* Sarasvatī is worshiped as *vāc*, she is not explicitly mentioned as an Āprī deity, and as a river she has disappeared from the ground in the vicinity of Kurukṣetra. She explains that she goes underground out of contempt for the *mlecchas* and similar practitioners of a *prakṛti*-based ideology and language. Whether visible or otherwise, the Sarasvatī River is respected in the *Mahābhārata* as the

manifestation of a deity and as a great and special river, whose entire course abounds in pilgrimage sites. Thus we hear in this chapter of Balarāma's upstream tour along the (partially dried) bed of the Sarasvatī up to her source near the Yamunā's source. And we hear as well as of Sarasvatī's dealings with Vasiṣṭha.

In concluding this preliminary work and looking back I have the impression that bringing together Ṛg-vedic and *Mahābhārata* texts helps contextualize both. For one thing, there is ideological similarity: *bráhman* and *vāc* are the philosophical foundation in both cases.

Although there is also a strong ideological continuity, I have not had the opportunity to gather enough materials to elaborate on it. One point not subject to debate seems to be the cyclical notion of time in the *Mahābhārata*. A similar notion of historical time appears to be implicit in the *Ṛg-veda*. Thus RV 4.27.1 speaks about a bird (and we encountered a bird before) that has certain knowledge already from his mother's womb; and RV 10.190.3 says that "the creator [or arranger] set in order the sun and the moon each as the previous one [or as previously done]."

That the humans–nature relationship in the *Ṛg-veda* is based on rituals is another established point. This point is illustrated, for example, in the Ṛg-vedic hymn RV 1.152. Furthermore, many Ṛg-vedic passages show how this ritual relationship was based on *vāc*: RV 1.164.34–35 (*vāc* is said to dwell in the highest, remotest, the most excellent heaven, and "*yajña* is the navel of the world"); 1.164.47–52; 3.54.12–13; 10.50.6; 10.71.3 ("by means of *yajña* they followed the tracks of *vāc* and found she had entered in the sages; they brought her back and distributed her in many places; seven singers praise her in unison"). In RV 10.101 we see how diverse crafts were practiced in the service of *yajña*.

One ideological difference in the *Mahābhārata* may be the role and significance of rituals to carry out the humans–nature relationships. The character and magnitude of this change, though, is not something I have been able to cover here. And there may well be additional ideological differences, such as *ṛta* vs. *dharma* as the basic ideological principle, or a difference in the role played by the gods in the dealings among humans.

Regarding the relation between textual and archaeological / geological evidence, and considering Thompson's remarks about a multi-dimensional analysis, I don't see any necessary incompatibility in their conclusions. Rather, the definition of what is "natural" seems different in the two world-views that are at the basis of these two approaches. Thus we heard from the *Ṛg-veda*: "The perfectly carved rivers cut out by a skillful artificer [Vibhvan, one of the three Ṛbhus]" (RV 5.42.12) and "[Sarasvatī has been] built by Vibhvan [a heavenly artificer who carved her river bed]" (RV 6.61.13). What is "artificial" nowadays is "natural" in Ṛg-vedic times.

Furthermore, the descriptions of the lands the Sarasvatī River runs through that are found in the *Mahābhārata* are perhaps easier to reconcile with the archaeological findings. Thus we hear that the river banks were at some time overpopulated with hermitages, whereas modern archaeologists have found numerous settlements along the dried bed(s) of an ancient river. We also hear that along the Sarasvatī there were in *Mahābhārata* times both deserts and wooded areas, whereas modern researchers have found significant fluctuations in climate and changes in the river course, all of which imply changes in irrigation and vegetation patterns.

I end here hoping that this work may one day be enhanced and expanded by means of a more refined textual and archaeological analysis.

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